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NATIONAL LOUIS UNIVERSITY

HEADED FOR THE HEARTLAND: DECISION MAKING FACTORS FOR
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TO ATTEND RURAL AND SUBURBAN COMMUNITY
COLLEGES IN ILLINOIS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

In
COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERSHIP

BY

ERIC JOHN BOHMAN

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Doctoral Candidate ERIC JOHN BOHMAN

Title of Dissertation HEADED FOR THE HEARTLAND: DECISION MAKING
FACTORS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TO
ATTEND RURAL AND SUBURBAN COMMUNITY
COLLEGES IN ILLINOIS

Dissertation Chair DR. REBECCA S. LAKE


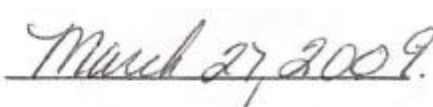
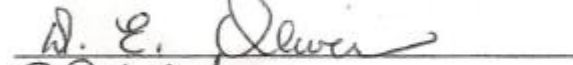
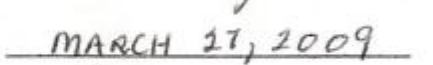
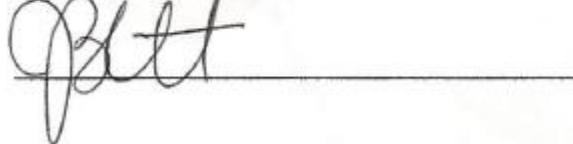
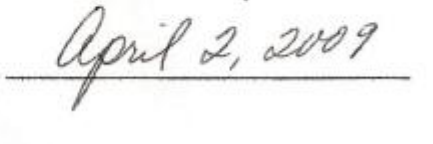
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We certify this dissertation, submitted by the above named candidate, is fully adequate in scope and quality to satisfactorily meet the dissertation requirement for attaining the Doctor of Education degree in the Community College Leadership Doctoral Program.

Signature

Date

ABSTRACT

Despite record growth in international student enrollment at community colleges, little is known about how the international students learn about community colleges and ultimately decide to attend. The purpose of this research is to identify what factors lead international students to decide to attend Illinois community colleges. Furthermore, this study explores both the knowledge students had about community colleges and the sources of this information prior to their decision to attend.

The research study utilized a multi-theoretical framework encompassing world culture theory, push-pull theory, and cognitive decision making theory. Using a qualitative case study design, thirteen international students from four different Illinois community colleges were interviewed. Study participants were selected from the four community colleges which were charter members of the Study Illinois consortium, an international student recruiting initiative involving the U.S. Department of Commerce and Illinois higher education institutions. An analysis of the interview data formulates the study's findings.

The findings reveal community college international students experience a distinctive decision making process when selecting their destination institution. As part of the process, international students relied most heavily on information provided by personal contacts or privately contracted educational agents in learning about community colleges. The research study illuminates the factors which resonate strongest with community college international students in these settings and the optimal steps in the decision making process in strategizing international student recruitment.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my grandfather and my children. They instill in me pride of the past and for the future.

To the memory of my grandfather, John Lewis Arend, I know you would have wanted to be present in seeing the first member of your family complete a doctorate degree. I drew strength from your commitment to achieving to the highest levels of education. Your presence can be found within the pages of this work.

To my children, Emma and Alec, may you draw inspiration from this work to continually strive to do your best.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Undertakings such as this one extends beyond the efforts of the researcher. I would certainly be remiss if I did not acknowledge those who helped and supported me in this process.

Special thanks to my wife, Cynthia, life-long partner and proofreader, who encouraged me to embark on this journey. Twenty years ago you prompted me to travel overseas for the first time, the beginning of many international adventures we would share. I could not have completed this without all the support you provided for me throughout this process.

Thanks to my parents, Paul and Ann Bohman, who gave me the opportunities to achieve endeavors like this. As I studied how international students first learned about community colleges, I am reminded how I was introduced to community colleges at an early age from my mother's involvement as community college instructor and the support you both gave me in studying abroad.

Thanks to all those who generously offered their time and insight throughout the research. To Jane Harris, Jerilyn Gadberry, Gabriela Cambiasso, and Jill Izumikawa, your contributions were invaluable.

A hearty thanks to Dr. Rebecca Sue Lake, my dissertation chair, whose repeated calls to "trust the process" will resonate well after the doctoral process is completed.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The world as we know it has expanded and contracted simultaneously. Access to information from all over the world is only a mouse click away. Communications with any part of the globe at any moment is at our fingertips. Although exchanges in commerce and learning have crossed global boundaries for centuries, never before has it occurred at such a rapid pace. At a December 2007 presentation in Chicago, Pulitzer Prize winner author of *The World is Flat*, Thomas Friedman, described what he felt is both extremely exciting and terrifying in our modern era, “Whatever can be done, will be done. It is only a question of whether it will be done by you or to you.” Regardless of whether one views this environment positively or negatively, the effect of what is described as *globalization* is inevitable.

The central trait of *globalization* is that it is multifaceted (Levin, 2001; Suarez-Orozco and Qin-Hilliard, 2004). It influences such aspects as the distribution of goods and services, flows of information, migration patterns, and cultural identity. The rapid flow of information and communication has signified the dawning of this era of *globalization*. An ever expansive deluge of data is readily accessible to broaden one's knowledge to the point that our current era has been described as the *Knowledge Age*. Bernie Trilling and Paul Hood (2001) of nonprofit research agency WestEd estimates this transformation to the *Knowledge Age* occurring in the United States in 1991 when expenditures on capital goods in technology exceeded traditional industrial equipment. The paradigm shift altered “the balance of what is valued in our work and in our society” (Trilling & Hood, 2001 p. 8). Education must evolve as part of globalization. As

Harvard Professor of Education Howard Gardner (2004), creator of Multiple-Intelligence Theory, asserts, “just as educational systems eventually adapted to the agricultural and industrial revolutions, ...they will have to adapt as well to the facts of the globalized, knowledge-centered economy and society” (p. 256). Educational institutions which fail to respond to the globalized knowledge age bear the risk of becoming extinct. As Harvard professors Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco and Desiree Baolin Qin-Hilliard (2004) attest, education systems which “neglect the larger global forces are likely to become obsolete, while those that proactively engage globalization’s new challenges are more likely to thrive” (p. 23).

Background of the Problem

In this age of knowledge and increasing globalization, education has become an increasingly valued commodity. In countries like Australia, international education is the country’s third largest source of export income with international students’ tuition bringing in 15% of the higher education budget (Labi, 2008). Higher education in the United States has often been slow to respond to these forces. President of John Hopkins University, William R. Brody (2007) noted, “This inertia has been their intrinsic advantage. Yet today they are subject to the same forces and stresses created by globalization that confront all other aspects of society” (p.132). Propriety institutions with online degree programs have posed challenges to the traditional brick and mortar colleges and universities as they compete for students. Just as labor in the U.S. is being *outsourced* to other countries, U.S. universities and colleges are *offshoring* by setting up programs in such places as Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Doha, and Abu Dhabi. This comes at a time of decreasing public funding for higher education. As geographical barriers

lessen as a result of globalization, the competition for students and funding has heightened.

One area in which this competition is most apparent is in regards to the international student market. There are several aspects of international students that make them attractive to any institution of higher learning. They add to the diversity on the campus and in the classroom, strengthen an institution's global network, and bring in additional revenue. The tuition for international students yields a greater percentage of profit than for local students. It is estimated that international students contribute \$15.5 billion annually into the U.S. economy (IIE, 2008). In the State of Illinois, international students expenditures were an estimated \$710 million for 2008 (IIE, 2008). In the current global financial crisis, the economic impact of international students is one of the few bright spots.

In sheer numbers, the United States has a dominant presence in the world's higher education institutions. Allan E. Goodman, President of the Institute of International Education, noted that the U.S. has "4,000 colleges and universities compared with the 7,768 higher education institutions outside the U.S." (Friedman, 2006 p. 317). With 33% of the world's colleges and universities in a country that has 4.5% of the world's population, the U.S. offers a wide range of options in higher education (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). However, the United States' share of the international student market has been dwindling from 25.3% in 2000 to 20% in 2008 (ACE, 2006; IIE, 2008). According to a report done by the American Council on Education (ACE), the United States had the weakest growth in international student enrollment from 1999-2005 among the top six host countries at 17% compared with the United Kingdom's 29%, Australia's 42%,

Germany's 46%, France's 81%, and Japan's 108% (2006). The report cites "national marketing strategies, aligning immigration policies with recruiting goals, offering more programs in English, and creating regional education hubs" as factors (ACE, 2006). For example, the United Kingdom's Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education exceeded their target enrollment goal for 2005 by 55% prompting a new initiative calling for 100,000 more international students in the next five years, double the target of the previous initiative (British Council USA, 2006). A system to allow greater student movement in higher education within Europe known as the Bologna Process (also known as the Bologna Accord) looks to imitate the mobility features of the U.S. system by 2010, while Middle Eastern Gulf States have started educational hubs such as UAE's Knowledge Village in Dubai and Qatar's Education City in Doha. It remains to be seen what will be the short and long term impact of today's global economic difficulties on the movement of international students coming to the United States for higher education opportunities.

An entire industry of international study abroad agents in the students' home countries and recruiting services in the host country have developed to market to international students. While some well-known U.S. institutions can focus on their *brand* and name recognition as a way to attract international students, other institutions have sought out this developing industry for alternatives. Illustrating this point, an Australian-based recruiting company paid 2.5 million dollars for an exclusivity agreement to recruit international students for a California university for ten years with the stipulation that there would be tuition (revenue) sharing (Redden, 2008).

Total international student enrollment continued to increase in the United States until the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001. In response to these specific terrorist attacks, the two pieces of legislation, the 2001 USA Patriot Act and the subsequent 2002 Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Act, tighten measures for entry into the country and what disciplines international students could study. As a result, the United States experienced in 2003 its first decline in international student enrollment in 32 years (IIE, 2005).

The electronic reporting system SEVIS (Student Exchange Visitor Information System) was mandated under the Patriot Act to be fully implemented by the beginning of 2003. It also imposed a \$100 collection fee for potential international students, which was met with opposition from higher education groups (Urias and Yeakey, 2005). The US Department of Homeland Security has called for upgrading SEVIS and doubling the fee for possible international students to \$200 arguing in a statement to the Chronicle of Higher Education that this increase represents “less than one half of one percent of the average tuition costs for a four year college education” (Hermes, 2008). The Chronicle of Higher Education reported that the extra \$100 could have a negative effect on more cost conscious students particularly those applying to community colleges (Hermes, 2008).

Even the federal Secure Borders and Open Doors Advisory Committee, which included one community college president, Eduardo J. Padron of Miami-Dade College, stated in its report that,

...statistics, public opinion studies, and anecdotal evidence show that the policies put in place to make our borders more secure are perceived as making travel to the

U.S. more difficult and unpleasant for many foreign visitors than before 9/11 and in comparisons to other countries. (Department of Homeland Security, 2008 p.7)

To help address some of these complex issues, the Secure Borders and Open Doors advisory committee recommended a “comprehensive national policy for attracting international students and place a White House official in charge of coordinating implementation of the policy” (Department of Homeland Security, 2008 p. 9).

The federal government has taken action by increasing funding to market the U.S. as an educational destination. Funding for the United States State Department’s Education USA Advising centers was increased from \$3.5 million in 2002 to \$10.6 million in 2007 (McMurtrie, 2008). An additional \$1.5 million was earmarked for international students who could not afford testing fees or travel for visa interviews. Thomas A. Farrell, U.S. Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs’ Deputy Assistant Secretary for Academic Programs, told the Chronicle of Higher Education that the increase spending “is the best damn investment the U.S. government is making” (McMurtrie, 2008 p. 25). Another federal agency that has been actively involved in international student recruitment is the U.S. Department of Commerce. Working with U.S. embassies and consulates around the world, the U.S. Department of Commerce has directed state-wide international student recruiting initiatives with institutions of higher education. One example of these U.S. Department of Commerce’s sponsorship efforts is the *Study Illinois* Consortium, which allows for educational institutions in Illinois to pool resources in order to promote the state as an educational destination.

Institutions themselves have taken active measures to increase international student enrollment through international recruitment fairs and advertising. In a 2008 report by

the Institute of International Education, the most frequently cited reasons for increasing international student enrollment was “growing reputation and visibility of my institution abroad” and “more active recruiting efforts” (IIE, 2008). The same report indicated “lack of funding and resources” as the most cited reason institutions cannot take additional steps to recruit international students (IIE, 2008). Low cost resources like the internet have become another resource for colleges and universities to promote their institution to all ends of the globe. The expansion of the internet allows for schools even with the most modest resources to have a presence in cyberspace. Colleges and universities have entered into consortium as another way to curb the costs involved in international student recruitment.

Impact on Community Colleges and Their Response

Community colleges have made concerted efforts toward recruitment through a variety of channels including consortia, recruiting fairs, and advertising. However, the larger task before community colleges is explaining the role of community colleges in the higher education structure of the United States to constituents abroad. Unlike the widely understood university system, the U.S. community college system and its relationship to U. S. universities is unfamiliar outside of the United States and Canada. Community colleges, supporting organizations, and government institutions have collaborated in developing awareness of the community college concept throughout the world. The American Association of Community College began international student recruitment trips in 2002 in the aftermath of September 11th in their efforts to “elevate the international profile of community colleges in global education and exchange” (AACC,

2008). The organization partnered with the company, Study in the USA, to create a website, CommunityCollegeUSA.com, with information on the community college concept, its unique qualities, and links to community colleges in 20 different languages. George R. Boggs, the President and CEO of AACC, stated, “ensuring that the number of international students who have access to the benefits of community colleges continues to grow is a priority for the American Association of Community Colleges” (IIE, 2008). U.S. Department of State’s Education USA promoted community colleges as an institution destination in 2007 dedicating an entire edition of their Connections newsletter to community colleges. Community colleges have created their own consortia such as the International Education Exchange Community College Consortium (www.ieecccc.com) or joined four-year institutions in state initiatives like *Destination Indiana* (www.fadams.iweb.bsu.edu), *Study Oregon* (www.studyoregon.com), and *Study Illinois* (www.studyillinois.org). With this increased focus on community colleges internationally, the questions arise as to how students are learning about community colleges as well as whether recruitment efforts by community colleges or other like-minded organization are fruitful.

Capitalizing on the name recognition of U.S. universities, some community colleges have promoted the benefits of their transfer function. However, there have been some cases reported in the Wall Street Journal and Contra Costa Times in which community colleges have misled the international students by promoting the ease of transferring to a top-tier university (Golden, 2002; Krupnick, M., 2007).

Studies done on international students at community colleges have shown the tighter laws and reporting procedures for studying in the U.S. producing a consistent negative

effect on the perception of prospective students (Coffman, 2007; Colondres, 2005; Urias, 2003). However, in terms of international student enrollment numbers, community colleges are experiencing record increases. While doctoral/research institutions have just now started to rebound from decreasing international student enrollments in the aftermath of September 11th, 2001, community colleges have well surpassed their pre-September 11th student totals. Community colleges demonstrate slightly over an 18% increase from 1999-2007 with over 86,000 international students enrolled in 2006-07 (See Table 1).

Table 1. Enrollment Trends of International Students in the United States

SCHOOL TYPE	2005/06	2006/07	% change from 2005/2006	% change from 1999-2007
Associate's	83,160	86,179	3.6	18.1
Doctoral/Research	328,575	341,971	4.1	8.5
Baccalaureate	27,096	26,457	-2.4	13.5
Master's	99,232	101,321	2.1	16.4
Specialized	26,351	26,691	1.3	12.1

Note: From *Open doors report 2006/2007* (Table 8) by Institute for International Education, 2007, Washington, DC: Author.

Community colleges have emerged as the fast growing destination for international students in the U.S. Throughout the U. S., fifteen community colleges had enrollments exceeding 1,000 international students. The number of community colleges with greater than 1,000 international students has increased from eleven in 2006 to the current fifteen. The community colleges with the largest international student enrollment are all in urban or suburban districts in California, Florida, Maryland, New York, Texas, or Washington

State. By comparison, only two baccalaureate and fifteen masters institutions had international student enrollments of 1,000 or more (IIE, 2008). Table 2 lists the 16 community colleges with enrollments exceeding 1,000 international students.

Table 2. Largest International Student Enrollment in U.S. Community Colleges

Community College	Location	Enrollment
Houston Community College System	Houston, TX	4,241
Santa Monica College	Santa Monica, CA	3,124
De Anza College	Cupertino, CA	2,394
Montgomery College	Rockville, MD	1,994
N. Harris Montgomery CC District	The Woodlands, TX	1,844
CUNY Borough of Manhattan CC	New York, NY	1,602
Northern Virginia Community College	Annandale, VA	1,500
Miami-Dade College	Miami, FL	1,227
Diablo Valley College	Pleasant Hill, CA	1,207
Nassau Community College	Garden City, NY	1,171
Foothill College	Los Altos, CA	1,149
City College of San Francisco	San Francisco, CA	1,141
Pasadena City College	Pasadena, CA	1,034
Green River Community College	Auburn, WA	1,033
Seattle Central Community College	Seattle, WA	1,017

Note: From *Open doors report 2007/2008* (Table 11) by Institute for International

Education, 2008, Washington, DC: Author.

Growth in the number of international students attending Illinois community colleges is not limited to urban and suburban settings. Illinois Community College Board Vice-President of Adult Education and Institutional Support Karen Hunter-Anderson noted that rural community colleges have seen significant increases in Illinois. According to Hunter-Anderson, (personal communication, March 12, 2008) rural community colleges “don’t have as much diversity so a few international students have a greater impact.” Without the draw of the close proximity to a major metropolitan area with a significant immigrant diaspora, how these international students learn about their rural community colleges and decide to attend is unclear. For rural community colleges looking to expand their global network and enhance their student diversity profile, information on factors which influence international students is critical. In the current global financial crisis, the monetary benefit of international students to these rural institutions cannot be understated.

Despite the increasing number of international students at community colleges, very little research has investigated why international students come to community colleges. This study’s general intention is to learn what factors influence international students to come to community colleges. Additionally, what information international students have about community colleges when they make their decision and the sources of the information will be explored. From the perspectives of international students, community colleges and U.S. government agencies can take appropriate measures to match their recruitment initiatives with international students’ priorities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify what factors lead international students to decide to attend Illinois community colleges. The following are driving questions arising from this study:

1. What factors weigh most predominantly in the international students' decision to attend a United States community college in Illinois?
2. Prior to making their decision, what information and knowledge regarding community colleges in the U.S. and the position of community colleges in the U.S. higher education system do international students possess?
3. What are the informational sources and in what ways are these sources utilized to assist international students in making their decision to attend a U.S. community college in Illinois?
4. What are commonalities, patterns and differences among the identified factors stated by international students attending an Illinois suburban community college and those attending an Illinois rural community college?

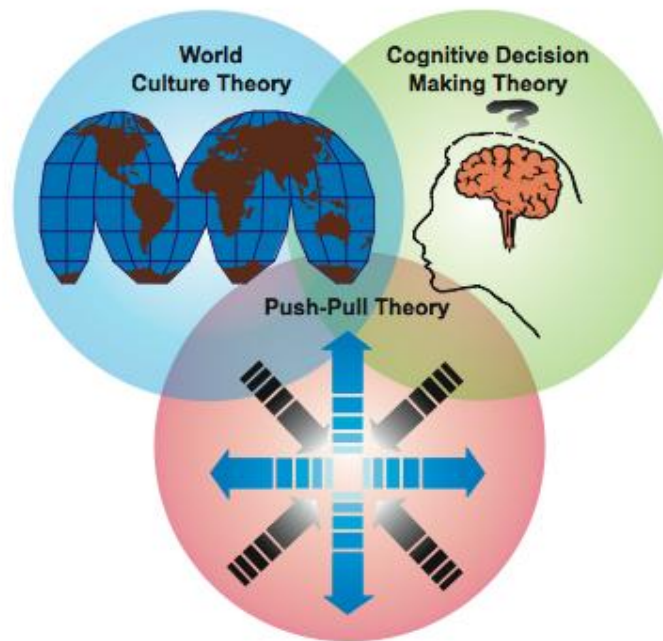
Theoretical Framework

Because of the array of factors that can contribute to the decision-making process of the international students and its dynamic nature, no one theoretical lens could be applied for this study. Rather the research questions posed call for a multi-theoretical framework to be utilized.

Based on the purposes of this qualitative study, three theories resonate: cognitive decision making theory, push-pull theory, and world culture theory. Yet, these theories

from different disciplines as represented by figure 1, effortlessly overlap in a Venn diagram model and create a more expansive perspective in which to illuminate and view the research.

Figure 1. Interrelationship of theories employed in this study.



These three theories not usually linked compliment each other in investigating the factors contributing to the students' decision making process. From the field of psychology, cognitive decision making theory matches with the intentions of this research focusing on the individual context of the decision making process. The contributing factors that may enter into a decision to study internationally at a community college could be a result of external forces within the home country or the host country. These forces could be economic, politic, personal, or a combination. Push-pull theory, which originated from economics, addresses this dynamic in the decision making process. The emergence of global identity and the desire to immerse oneself in an international

environment are factors that transcend national boundaries. World culture theory, a contemporary theory derived from sociology, was selected to address this phenomenon as it relates to the study.

Overview of the Design

The study's design is a qualitative interpretive case study. The qualitative design allows for a focused examination of the individual students' decision process while maintaining a broad global picture that includes the contextual elements of the process. The interpretive paradigm looks to analyze phenomena through the understanding of the participants allowing the researcher to incorporate the context used in the process and utilize the details of the situation. In situations in which research in the field is very limited as is the situation here, the case study is well suited as it can offer a "snapshot" of its contextual aspects of time and setting. According to Yin (2003), the case study methodology is ideal for examining "a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13).

This study collected data through qualitative interviews with international students already enrolled in community colleges in suburban and rural settings in the State of Illinois. The participating schools are members of the *Study Illinois* consortium of colleges and universities sharing some of the same resources for recruitment of international students and showing a commitment to bringing international students to their respective colleges. Thirteen students at four Illinois community colleges were interviewed for this study. Transcriptions of the interviews and the researcher's field

notes were coded to identify pertinent themes and patterns which comprise the study's findings. From these findings and the theoretical framework designed for this study, a model for the international student's decision making process to attend a community college is presented.

Importance of the Study to the Field

With increasing globalization, community colleges are well positioned with effective international student recruitment. This study can add to the understanding of what factors are pivotal in recruiting students internationally. With the advent of community college partnerships with overseas higher education institutions and online learning, an understanding of how community colleges are perceived and how they are valued by potential international students will enhance these future endeavors.

It has been projected that there will be 7.2 million international students worldwide by 2025 from the 2.5 million in 2004 (Boehm, Davis, et. al., 2002). If these projections hold true, community colleges can expect international students to be an increasing part of the educational landscape. Understanding the factors relevant to international students in their decision making process can aid community colleges in aligning their marketing to these factors. This study will contribute to understanding the influencing factors, the student's decision making process, and contributing sources.

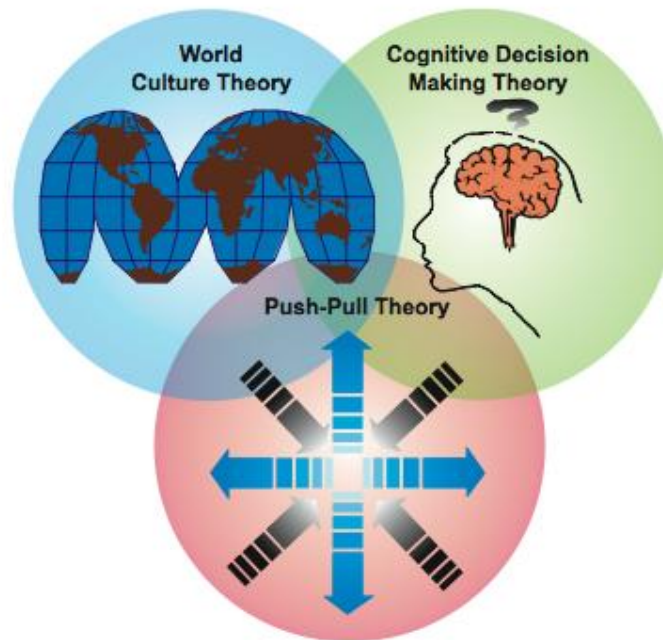
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature related to international students in higher education institutions specifically those in community colleges. Because of the global perspective of the study and its qualitative exploration of the international students' decision making process, no one overarching theory or concept can be applied. Instead, an effort has been made to select theories from different disciplines to provide a more encompassing point of view. To address the effect of the phenomenon of globalization on the international student, world culture theory is employed. This relatively new theory from the discipline of sociology creates an understanding of influences and forces of globalization which extend beyond either local or national boundaries. Push-pull theory, a theory borrowed from economics to analyze immigration movements, is also used to explore the factors which push students to leave their home countries and pull them to their school choice located in another country. Cognitive decision making theory is utilized to understand how knowledge engenders the act of individual decision making. As a psychology theory, cognitive decision making theory elucidates how factors are weighed in determining a decision. The literature review conveys how these particular theories from the disciplines of sociology, economics, and psychology have an interrelationship assisting the examination of this particular research topic. An illustration of this interrelationship is shown in the figure 1.

Figure 1. Interrelationship of theories employed in this study.



This unencumbered, less parochial use of theories illustrates how each theory integrates with and builds upon the other. When utilizing multiple theories from various disciplines, the potential exists for an extended intellectual discussion of theories and concepts. However, to provide a more active and integrated framework to explore this research, it is not the intent of this research to validate these theories, but rather to use this as a lens to view and interpret the international students' decision to attend a community college.

It is not the intention of this researcher to examine cultural differences among the international student participants or the role of culture in the decision making process. International students come from a wide variety of countries each with a distinct culture. Likewise, even students of the same nationality may exhibit cultural variations to some degree. The complexity of culture as to how it is defined, learned, and applied is beyond

the scope of this study. For the purposes of this study, world culture theory, push-pull theory, and cognitive decision making theory will provide the point of view needed to not only identify individual factors, but to also understand their influence on the choice of attending a United States community college.

Community Colleges

The last few years have seen an increase in the number of international students attending community colleges. While community colleges have taken active measures to attract international students to their campus, international students have been intentionally seeking out community colleges for their course of study. These parallel intentions raises the questions of why more international students are now enrolling in United States community colleges than previously. A historical perspective of the community colleges and its multiple missions may provide some insight into the growth in enrollment of international students.

The origins of the community college date back to the turn of the 20th century as institutions then known as junior colleges served as extensions of the high school system and feeder schools for universities. The importance of junior colleges in the US educational system was recognized after World War II in the U.S. President's Commission on Higher Education, 1948 commonly referred to as the Truman Commission (Cohen and Brawer, 2003). The report envisioned a network of colleges based within each community to address the various needs of the citizenry. Thus, the term "community college" fell into favor as the role of the two-year public institution as

the vocational and college transfer functions expanded to include such functions as continuing education, community services, and remedial education.

The Truman Commission proved to be a watershed moment for the community college movement. With the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the G.I. Bill, impacting college enrollment after World War II, community colleges were poised for unprecedented growth. University of California-Los Angeles community college researchers Arthur Cohen and Florence Brawer (2003) identified community colleges' greatest period of growth in the 1960's in which at one point there was a new community college opening its doors each week. By the early 1970's, the number of community colleges had doubled to about 800 and would continue to grow to number around 1200 today (Cohen and Brawer, 2003).

George Vaughan (2000), author of *the Community College Story*, defines the contemporary role of the community college as,

serving all segments of society through an open-access admissions policy that offers equal and fair treatment of all students, providing a comprehensive educational program, serving the community as a community-based institution of higher education, teaching and learning, and fostering life-long learning. (p. 3)

The general or basic missions of the community colleges are accessibility, affordability, and life-long learning. These shared tenants of U.S. community colleges lend themselves well to all students including international students.

With its open-door admissions policy, lower costs, and supportive student services such as remedial course work, access to higher education is attainable to populations who would not otherwise have been accepted. Cohen and Brawer (2003) believe, "for most

students in community colleges the choice is not between the community college and a senior residential institution; it is between the community college or nothing” (p.50).

Community colleges serve as a primary gateway to higher education for first generation college students who represent 45% of public community college enrollment compared to 29% at both public and private 4 year institutions (Phillippe and Sullivan, 2005). With public community colleges’ average annual tuition nearly three times less than 4 year public institutions, students with less financial support can save money staying at home and attending their local community college (Phillippe and Sullivan, 2005). Not surprisingly, lower-income groups attend community colleges in higher numbers than their four-year counterparts (Phillippe and Sullivan, 2005). This cost factor might very well be attractive to international students.

The commitment made by community colleges to continuous learning allows students the opportunity to attend on their own schedule. Students can enroll full-time, part-time or for one or two courses during the day or evening to accommodate their needs at a specific time in their lives. According to George Vaughan (2000), “many community college students... have reserved the role of student citizen to one of citizen student” (p. 14). Part-time students are the majority at public community colleges representing 66% of enrolled students compared with only 30% at both public and private 4-year schools (Phillippe and Sullivan, 2005). The flexibility of community college allows for students to pursue a career change at any point in their lifetime. As Cohen and Brawer (2003) point out, “community colleges allow students to drop in and out repeatedly, taking classes as their circumstances and preferences permit over their life span” (p. 6). Consequently, the average age of public community college students is 29 years old as

non-traditional age students, those students over the age of 25, represent a substantial portion of community college enrollment (Phillippe and Sullivan, 2005). Community colleges emerge as a convenient source of developing new skills or exploring new careers. For international students who may come from educational systems in their home country which limit their access to new careers after a traditional college age, community colleges may also be seen as a means to a new start and a second chance.

However, these unique features of the community colleges have also stigmatized their position within higher education. As professors of higher education, Debra Bragg of the University of Illinois and Barbara Townsend of the University of Missouri (2006) explain,

unable to deal with such complexity, most researchers judge the value of a community college education through the lenses of the four-year college and university....While comparisons between community colleges and other forms of higher education are convenient and almost automatic, all too often they result in a portrayal of the community college as inadequate and even inferior because it does not measure up when a four-year college yardstick is used. (p. xxi)

This has in part led to a perception in this country of community colleges as a “last chance” option. John Levin (2001), professor of education at the University of California – Riverside and researcher of Canadian and U.S. community colleges, succinctly explains, “the enormous power of the perception and practice of stratification in the U.S. has had an identifying effect upon community colleges as the least prestigious and lowest-quality post-secondary institution” (p. xi). This can be seen in the U.S. rankings of all types of goods and services with colleges and universities being one of them. Yet,

despite the negative perception of community colleges from such unbalanced measures, international student enrollment is rising at community colleges.

Community college's unique position in the higher education system of the United States makes it more responsive and adoptive to the changing needs of the community. This is noticeable in community colleges development of career and technical education (CTE) programs. Community colleges help to fill these gaps. As Levin (2001) states, "while all of higher education internationally experienced rising levels of economic objectives from government, business, industry, students, and the public in general, community colleges were poignant examples of the instrumentality of higher education" (p. xviii).

The focus of community colleges remains on the classroom. For faculty, more emphasis is placed on classroom instruction than on research or publishing. As Iowa State University's Laura Rendon and Terri B. Matthews (1994) proclaim, "the proudest claim of community colleges has always been that they are student centered teaching institutions" (p. 361). The class sizes are generally smaller and graduate assistants common to most university campus are virtually non-existent. As a result, faculty may be more accessible than those at a four year university. International students may be attracted to this classroom aspect of community colleges.

One of the goals of this study is to investigate what knowledge international students had about community colleges prior to making their decisions and what sources contributed to this knowledge. For international students who may have more alternatives and choices at their disposal, this study seeks to ascertain how and in what

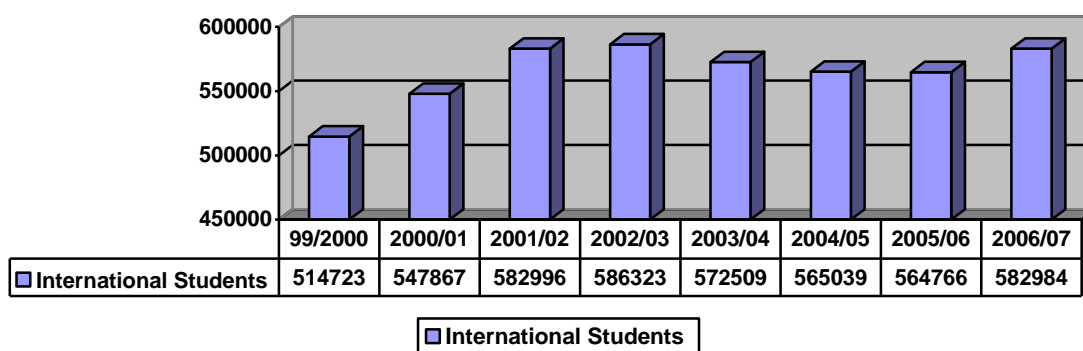
ways this knowledge and understanding of community colleges influenced the students' decision to attend a community college in the United States.

International Students Studying in the United States

The number of international students attending United States colleges and universities has been steadily increasing. However, what is unusual is the proportionally higher increase in the number of international students attending community colleges than those attending universities. The unvoiced question is why?

The Institute of International Education (IIE), a non-profit organization established after World War II, was created to act as a catalyst for educational exchange throughout the world. IIE has gathered statistics regarding international student and scholar enrollment in the United States since 1954. In the recent publication of Open Doors, their annual survey of higher education institutions, international student enrollment was up 3% in 2006/2007 from the previous year (IIE, 2007). Interestingly and surprisingly, community colleges have emerged as a destination for international students since their rapid expansion over 30 years ago. Table 3 demonstrates the decline in international student enrollment in all United States post-secondary institutions in the wake of the events of September 11th, 2001.

Table 3. Total International Student Enrollment in All U.S Post-Secondary Institutions



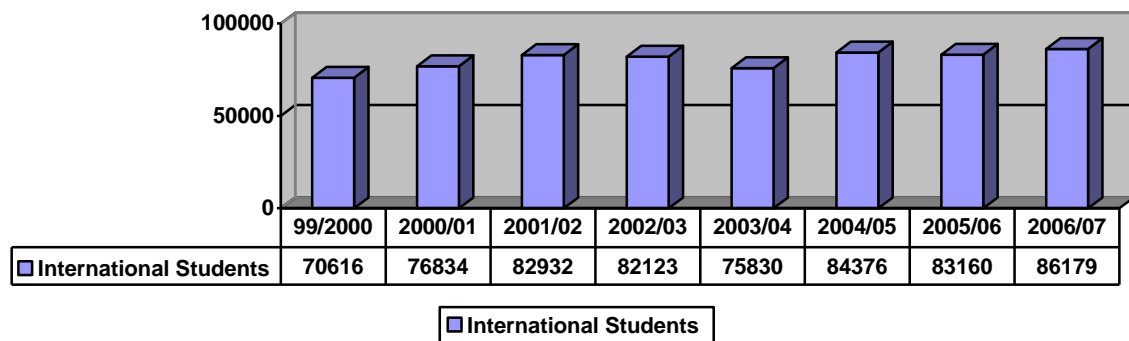
Note: From Institute for International Education, 2007. www.iie.org

America was confronted with an issue which would dwarf all others when the terrorist attacks on the U.S. on September 11th, 2001 brought global terrorism to the forefront of U.S. foreign policy. According to the IIE, this catastrophic event ended 32 consecutive years of international student enrollment growth in the United States as the federal government tightened up entry for foreigners (IIE, 2005). Two key pieces of legislation, the 2001 USA Patriot Act and the subsequent 2002 Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Act led to international student processing being done through the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System or SEVIS through the Immigration and Naturalization Services. Greater scrutiny was given to international student applications and processing fees were raised. In a study on the impact of federal policy regulations on foreign student enrollment conducted by Drexel University Assistant Professor of Education David Alexander Urias (2003), he noted that the process “shifted from a bureau focused on providing immigration benefits to a bureau responsible for enforcing immigration laws” (p. 305-306). Gigi Do-Nguyen, the coordinator for the Houston Community College System with the largest international student community college enrollments in the country, reported to the Chronicle of Higher Education that she

believes the negative attitude of consular staff contributed to the decline stating the students “are being treated like lepers” (Holmes, 2004). The result was a decrease in international students enrolling in all U.S. post-secondary institutions.

However, the community college international student enrollment rebounded sharply in 2004-2005 with record high enrollments, while the national numbers for universities continued to decrease for two more years. While the national numbers of those international students attending four year institutions were beginning to catch-up to pre-September 11th statistics, by 2004, community college numbers were exceeding them (Table 4). Community colleges are seeing the greatest growth among U.S. post-secondary institutions up roughly 20% compared to the national average of a 12% increase (IIE, 2007).

Table 4. International Student Enrollment at U.S. Community Colleges



Note: From Institute for International Education, 2007. www.iie.org

However, little research has been done to discover how international students learn about community colleges. This study explores what information these international students possess regarding community colleges prior to making their decisions and what factors contribute to their decision to attend a U.S. community college. Furthermore, this study takes in account how similar or varied decision making factors are for students

selecting a community college in a rural or suburban setting. These findings will be of benefit to community colleges engaged in marketing to international students or contemplating pursuing this avenue.

International student enrollment in community colleges is not a new phenomenon. As the number of community colleges grew dramatically in the 1960's and early 1970's, so did the number of international students enrolled. At this time according to community college historian Thomas Deiner (1986), "a new issue, the accommodation of students from other lands, emerged as a major concern for many junior and community colleges" (p.183). This concern led to the National Colloquium on the Foreign Student in United States Community and Junior Colleges held in Racine, Wisconsin in October 1977 (Diener, 1986). The colloquium advocated for community colleges to play a larger role in international education and predicted the increase in the number of international students attending community colleges. According to Rosalind Latiner Raby (2000), the Director of California Colleges for International Education, a consortium of California community colleges, recruiting of international students was limited and was primarily driven by foundations and consortiums with one of the most noted consortiums being Community Colleges for International Development (CCID). Established in October of 1976, the CCID's mission was to provide opportunities for building global relationships that strengthen educational programs and promote economic development (CCID, n.d.). In a personal interview with the first Executive Director of CCID Robert Breuder (personal communication, Sept.6, 2007), he recalled how community college presidents entered into international activities with some trepidation "fearful of what might be said back home." But despite international development not being a priority for many

community colleges in 1970s and early 1980s, Brueder believes that, “for those (community colleges) that entered in the 1970s, it was one of the most colorful dimensions for these schools.”

With the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, international student enrollment in the United States grew rapidly particularly in the community colleges. Community colleges saw a 40% growth in international students from 1993 to 1999 more than 25% greater growth than any other sector of higher education (Lane, 2001). Former AACC president Edmund J. Gleazer stated in CCID founding president Maxwell King and Seymour Ferish’s book, *Integrating the International/Intercultural Dimension in the Community College* (1992),

if people in this nation are confronted with issues that transcend international boundaries and if education has responsibilities in qualifying them to deal with these issues, then the community college, beyond any other postsecondary institutions, require an international dimension. (p. iii)

Despite post 9/11 difficulties for international students pursuing study in the U.S., community colleges are the one arena of higher education which has shown the greatest growth. This growth is due in part to increasing efforts after September 11, 2001 to inform the international student market about the qualities and benefits of community colleges. Starting in 2002, the American Association of Community College has begun recruiting trips to Asia, Europe, and Latin America to introduce the community college option to students outside of the U.S. As part of this effort to promote community colleges as an option for international students, AACC identified the top ten benefits to attending a U.S. community college in their marketing materials to be:

1. Lower cost;
2. Excellent transfer opportunities;
3. Flexible English proficiency requirements;
4. Focus on teaching and student success;
5. Small class size;
6. Additional practical training opportunity;
7. Use of the latest technologies;
8. Hundreds of programs to choose from;
9. Opportunities to experience US culture;
10. Excellent student support services. (Irwin, 2007, p. 4-5)

The Chronicle of Higher Education estimates between 25% to 41% of the 1,195 U.S. community colleges actively recruit international students through international recruiting trips or outsourcing to international recruiters (Evelyn, 2005). Additionally, with the world-wide access of the internet, community college can do “soft recruiting” by designing WebPages for international students promoting the community college’s programs. The AACC along with its sister organization, the Association of Community College Trustees, made a joint statement in 2006 advocating for a commitment to international education. They also estimate international students attending community colleges make an annual contribution of \$1.87 billion to the U.S. economy (AACC & ACCT, 2006). According to AACC President/CEO George R. Boggs, “helping international students understand the advantages of community college has been a priority of AACC, and we are pleased to those efforts paying off” (IIE, 2006b).

Over the last few years, the federal government has begun to increase efforts as well to enhance international student enrollment. In 2005, the *Community College Times* reported that the federal government has responded by speeding up processes in reviewing visa application and hiring 350 more consular positions. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Education Margaret Spelling have been making educational visits abroad to change negative international public perceptions on studying in the U.S. (Burcham, 2005). One of the 12 recommendations by the U.S. Government's Secure Borders and Open Doors Advisory Committee in 2008 was "articulate a comprehensive national policy for attracting international students and place a White House official in charge of coordinating implementation of the policy" (Department of Homeland Security, 2008 p. 9). Furthermore, to increase the number of international students studying at community colleges in the U.S., the Department of State Summit on International Education in January 2006 established a \$3 million cooperative program for international students to study for associate degree or certificate program at 2-year institutions (Pekow, 2006). The stated purpose of this initiative is to "engage the community college sector in the United States to increase the number of international students enrolled at U.S. community colleges and to reinforce community college efforts to build international ties" (Pekow, 2006).

State governments have also recognized the importance of promoting international student recruitment for community colleges. A recent development is the emergence of international education coalitions within state boundaries. Sometimes referred to as "armchair recruiting", these groups encourage institutions to consolidate their efforts. One of the first programs of this kind was "Destination Indiana" funded by the Indiana

Department of Commerce and the Indiana Consortium of International Programs in 2001 according to Daniel Obst and Joanne Forster of the Institute of International Education (2006). Representing all accredited institutions of higher education in the state, these concerted efforts helped move Indiana from 13th to 10th most popular American destination for international students at all levels of higher education (Obst and Forster, 2006).

The State of Illinois has recognized the importance of international students in an age of globalization with the passing of Illinois Senate Joint Resolution 0075 in 2008. This legislation states,

Illinois institutions of higher education welcome international students and scholars and recognize that these students increase campus diversity, enabling more enriching learning environments, contribute their talents and perspectives, strengthen our campuses, and enhance students' awareness and understanding of others. (l. 10-15)

Charged with addressing student enrollment in community colleges in today's global environment, the Student Issues Subcommittee for the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) recommended in December, 2006 to the ICCB that community colleges make the campuses "more accommodating to international students in order to expose students to a more diverse student population and to create a more global postsecondary experience" (ICCB, 2006).

One program that has emerged to focus on international student recruitment in Illinois is a consortium of accredited institutions of higher education called *Study Illinois*. Six of the 40 member institutions found in *Study Illinois* are community colleges. All

participating schools gain financial and technical support from the US Department of Commerce, while the member institutions pay a nominal fee.

Prior to the global economic crisis of 2008, it was expected that the number of college students studying outside their home countries would continue to grow. By 2025, an estimated 7.2 million international students will be studying abroad up dramatically from the 2.5 million in 2004 (Boehm, Davis, et al., 2002; IIE, 2006a). Considering these trends in international student enrollment at community colleges, a further understanding of what contributing factors influence a student's decision can benefit community colleges who want to increase their international student enrollment for the foreseeable future.

In summary, international students have been attending community colleges for some time despite global events and increasing bureaucratic obstacles. However, the tragedy of September 11th, 2001 and the subsequent U.S. federal government bureaucratic reaction has lead to the concerted efforts of higher educations institutions, representative organizations, and the federal and state governments to increase their effort in recruiting international students. For American community colleges this means creating greater awareness of the unique qualities and benefits of the community college. This study focuses on community colleges which have partnered with the *Study Illinois* consortium to explore how and in what ways this higher education partnership may have contributed to the international students' knowledge of US community colleges and their decision to attend Illinois community college. The findings would be beneficial to other U.S. colleges and universities considering or engaged in similar international student recruitment activities.

Research on Community College International Students

Efforts were made to find research on community college international students. However, research found regarding international students at community colleges was limited. This fact is confirmed by many of today's researchers. They feel that research on international students attending community colleges is not as robust as it is on international students at four-year institutions (Doku, 2007; Hagedorn and Lee, 2005; Zeszotarski, 2003). What research has been done regarding community college international students tends to address issues such as cultural adjustment or their use of different student services. The reasons international students attend community colleges are rarely examined although scholars have hypothesized what those reasons might be. John Levin (2001) carried out research on international students, particularly those from the Pacific Rim, enrolled at community colleges in the western U. S. and Canada. Levin concluded in his study, that the goal of learning English was a primary driver for these international students. Regina V. Ewing (1992), associate professor and counselor at Kapi'olani Community College in Hawaii, drawing from her own experience and research believed the unique characteristics of the community college principally its ease of entry, low tuition, small class sizes, and learner-based focus were also reasons international students enroll at U.S community colleges. More recent research coupled with the changing world dynamic has called into question some of these accepted ideas of why students select to travel from their home country and study at community colleges.

Two recent studies are germane to this research. UCLA researcher scholar Paula Zeszotarski's (2003) study focused on international students at Santa Monica Community College. As part of her research, she collected data on what influenced the international

students to attend Santa Monica Community College. Using a push-pull and transnational theoretical framework, Zeszotarski's study encompasses how international students perceive their studying abroad experience and the gaining of global competencies in an age of rapid globalization.

University of Kansas researcher Nii Sai Doku's (2007) study involved one community college in a Midwestern urban setting and one in a Midwestern suburban setting. Doku builds upon Zeszotarski's research by examining a variation of community college settings, but his emphasis is on the adjustments international students undergo when attending community colleges. He examined the reasons why international students attend an urban or suburban community college to set the stage for an exploration on the academic and social experience of the international student. Table 5 illustrates the findings of these two studies.

Table 5. Comparison of Zeszotarski's and Doku's Research on International Students

Researcher Year	# of students studied	Schools	Reasons for attending a CC
Zeszotarski 2003	20	Santa Monica Community College	Transfer option Lower tuition Flexibility in education Location (industry and climate) Student services
Doku 2007	18, 9 for each college	A Midwest urban & suburban community college	Recommendation of family and friends Lower tuition Ease of admission Location (proximity to family/friends)

Common to the Zeszotarski and Doku studies, the international student participants did not select English as their major area of study when applying for their student visa. Zeszotarski (2003) felt this was a significant difference in her research. She suggests, international students who have high level English language skills (including speaking, listening, and writing) should not be lumped into the same category in research or practice as those who do not...In research and practice, the importance of distinguishing students based on their abilities and goals rather than visa status is affirmed. (p. 255-256)

Students who come to the U.S. primarily to study English have distinctly different educational options, one that includes proprietary language schools.

Characteristics uniquely found in US community colleges which draw community residents could be appealing for international students as well. With some international students coming from countries which limit access to higher education through quotas or national entrance exams, US community colleges provide a pathway to entry to four year institutions of higher education. Perhaps the idea that community colleges provide a second chance at higher education for US citizens appears to serve a similar role for students looking to study abroad.

The ease of entry and the idea of providing students a second chance, hallmarks of community college's open-door admission, have been identified as factors in earlier research in 1992 by Regina Ewing at Kap'olani Community College. For international students, ease of entry at a community college would mean fewer required college placement tests required by many selective institutions like the Standard Aptitude Test (SAT) or the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) for non-native English speakers. The aspect of ease of entry and providing a second chance will be explored as possible factors.

Another frequently cited reason for selecting a community college in past research was the relatively lower costs involved (Doku, 2007; Ewing, 1992; Zeszotarski, 2003). In promoting community colleges to international students, the American Association of Community Colleges gives "lower cost" first as one of the top ten reasons for international students to attend a community college. The difference in tuition could be about four times less than that of a four-year public institution providing international

students with a considerable cost savings. With private universities, the difference in tuition can be exponentially much greater.

With the tightening of public money for higher education, community colleges have had to find new sources of revenue and increasing tuition especially for international students who do not vote has been one avenue. Affordability, a central tenant of community college, does not always translate to lower costs for international students. International tuition per credit hour at some suburban Chicago area community colleges is up to \$375 to \$410 exceeding neighboring private non-profit 4 year universities.

According to data compiled by the Illinois Community College Board, tuition for international students ranges widely in the state from \$100.20 per credit hour in the southern part of the state to \$437.22 in the Chicago suburbs (ICCB, 2008). Tuition increased at twenty eight of the thirty-nine community college districts in the State of Illinois. Five districts have made no tuition increases in the last three years, while six colleges decreased international student tuition (ICCB, 2008). This study includes one community college which has decreased international student tuition, two which have increased tuition, and one that has remained the same.

What sets this study apart is an exploration of how an understanding of community colleges is formed by international students and whether different factors exist for those students selecting a rural community colleges compared to a suburban location.

Additionally, the community colleges selected for this study are all participants in the *Study Illinois* consortium, a group of higher education institutions formed in a post-September 11, 2001 environment to pool efforts in increasing international student enrollment. Also being examined in this study is how *Study Illinois*, formed in 2002-

2003, and other influences contributed to the international students' knowledge of their destination school and factored in their decision process. The insights gathered from this study will be of interest to community colleges in their international recruiting efforts.

Theoretical Framework for the Study

The factors which contribute to international students' decision making process are wide and varied; therefore, not one theoretical approach could capture the underpinnings of this process. An approach which presents multiple lenses to view this research problem is appropriate. The research for this study takes place within a multi-theoretical framework which encompasses three theories: push-pull theory, world culture theory, and cognitive decision making theory. This framework designed for this study incorporates contributing factors from the home and host countries, global influences, and the individual decision making process. Push-pull theory and world culture theory both are situated in the context of the individual and this relationship to global forces. From these two theoretical perspectives the dynamic relationships of the various elements can be illuminated. The inclusion of cognitive decision making theory allows for analysis to extend to the process of making the decision to travel outside of one's home country for educational opportunity. Cognitive decision making theory puts the influential factors into the context of the decision making process. The combination of these three theories enriches the understanding of the data and the international students' individual decision making process.

Push-Pull Theory

Push-pull theory has been often employed to facilitate an understanding or to describe the decision making process for international students (Agarwal & Winkler, 1985; Arif, 2007; Kawai, 2005; Mazzarol, Choo, & Nair, 2001; Mazzarol, Soutar, Smart, & Choo, 2001; McMahon, 1992). Johnette Peyton (2005) of the Graduate Management Admission Council, an association of graduate business schools around the world, describes the nature of push-pull theory as,

an uncontrolled, open process of natural flows of people where difficulties, such as poverty and unemployment in the home country may push people to other countries that have favorable conditions such as a high standard of living or job opportunities that pull them there. (p.1-2)

Derived from marketing theory, push-pull theory was first used by U.S. Demographer Everett Lee in 1966 to describe immigrant migration patterns. The push-pull theory emerged in the dyadic period of the Cold War. Immanuel Wallerstein's (1976) socio-economic based World-System Theory defined this environment as an interrelated system of pulling host countries at the core with push home countries sitting on the periphery. Students in countries which were situated on the periphery would be pushed out to those countries at the center of commerce and culture. At the same time, countries at the central or core facilitated a setting which would pull international students to fulfill their studies.

Push-pull theory became popularized in assessing international student patterns as a result of Lakshama G. Rao's 1979 seminal work, *The Brain Drain and Foreign Students*, which warned of the negative consequences of scholars from developing countries studying abroad. The "brain drain" and the push-pull forces which contribute to this flow

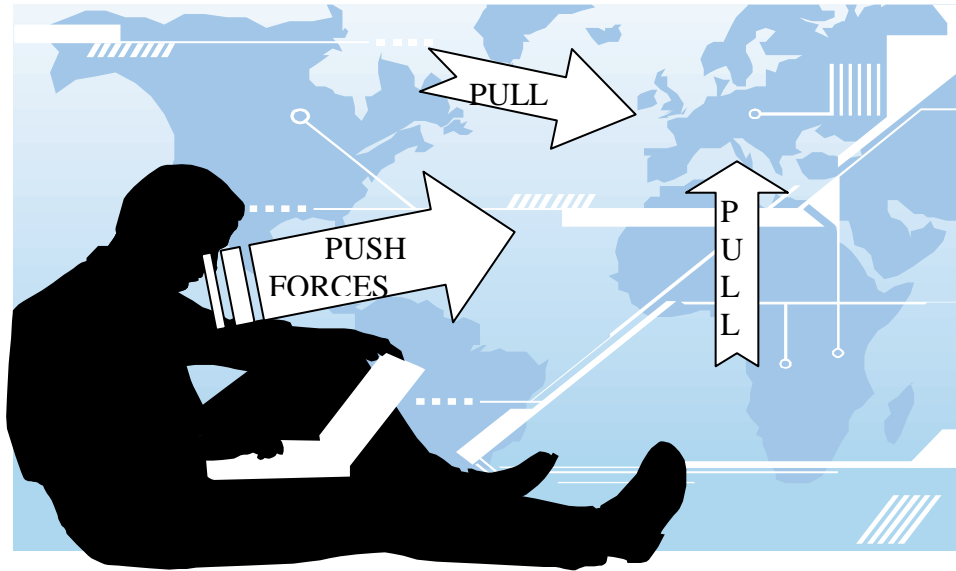
of students to countries with greater financial and professional rewards remain topical and relevant today. Phillip G. Altbach (2008), Director of the Center for International Higher Education, said in the online journal *International Higher Education*,

while the ‘brain drain’ of the past has become more of a ‘brain exchange’ with flows of both people and knowledge back and forth across borders and among societies, the great advantage still accrues to the traditional academic centers at the expense of the peripheries. Even China, and to some extent India, with both large and increasingly sophisticated academic systems, find themselves at a significant disadvantage in the global academic marketplace. For much of Africa, the traditional brain drain remains largely a reality. (p. 2)

Push-pull theory has sustained its popularity as scholars from various disciplines have continually revisited it to analyze the various positive and negative external factors influencing the decision making process.

The two main elements which comprise this theory are the push forces which drive one from his/her home country and the pull forces which draw one to a host country (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Illustration of the push-pull forces at work in a global context.



As Tim Mazzarol and Geoffrey Soutar of the University of Western Australia's Graduate School of Management (2002) describe this in the context of international students, “‘push factors’ operate within the source country and initiate a student's decision to undertake international study. ‘Pull factors’ operate within a host country to make that country relatively attractive to international students” (p. 2). Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) contend that the push factors are weighed first before pull factors. In this sense students would decide to study outside their home country before deciding on a host country. A series of surveys led by Mazzarol on behalf of the Australian International Education Foundation and Australian Education International reinforced this point (Mazzarol, Choo, and Nair, 2001; Mazzarol, Kemp, and Savery, 1997; Mazzarol, Soutar, Smart, & Choo, 2001). However, Nattavud Pimpa's work in 2002 on behalf of the Ministry of Education in Thailand showed a greater interdependence of push and pull factors in the decision making process than previously thought. Regardless of the

sequencing, both researchers recognize these pushing and pulling forces work in concert in the international students' decision making process.

Earlier studies have examined the complex and interrelationship of these push-pull factors. A longitudinal research of Vinrod B. Agarwal of Old Dominion University and Donald R. Winkler of the University of Southern California (1985) with students from 15 developing countries in the eastern hemisphere studying in the U.S. reflected this dynamic. In the Agarwal and Winkler study, they found the price of education, per capita income in the home country, and the expected benefits of studying abroad to be major push-pull factors in decision making of international students. The study pointed to a combination of the increasing expense of U.S. higher education coupled with enhanced educational opportunities in the home countries leading to a decline in the proportion of international students pursuing study in the United States. Although the United States' share of the market has steadily eroded, the number of students pursuing their studies abroad has increased. The demand for a U.S. education has not diminished particularly in the case of community colleges, where international student enrollments are at record levels. However, the factor of costs related to the benefits found in Agarwal and Winkler's study could suggest students are recognizing community colleges' value in obtaining a U.S. education.

University of California –Santa Barbara International Education researcher Mary E. McMahon (1992) went a step further in a retrospective historical study to identify the push and pull factors. McMahon found a correlation in push-pull factors on international student patterns from 18 developing countries to more developed countries in the 1960's and 1970's. Her work identified the following factors:

Table 6. Push-Pull Forces From McMahon's (1992) Study on International Students
in the 1960's and 1970's

<u>Push Forces</u>	<u>Pull Forces</u>
1. The economic wealth of home country	1. Size of host country's economy
2. Priority on education by home country	2. Economic links between host and home countries
3. Availability of educational opportunities in home country	3. Host nations' political and cultural links to the home countries
4. Involvement of home country in world economy	

The two predominant themes which emerge from this research on international students from 50 years ago are accessibility and economics. These findings match well with the mission of U.S. community colleges which emphasize both affordability and accessibility for students in their community.

The pull forces which draw students to an institution outside of their home country are particularly relevant to this study on international students at Illinois community colleges. Mazzarol, Kemp, and Savery (1997) identified six pull factors from their research on international students in Australia. These six factors appear frequently in literature regarding international students' decision making process on selecting their host institution (Table 7).

Table 7. Mazzarol, Kemp, and Savery's (1997) Six Factors Influencing Student Selection of a Host Country

Factor	Description
1. knowledge and awareness	Availability of information on the host country, reputation for quality, and recognition of host countries' qualifications in home country
2. personal recommendations	Referrals from family, friends, and "gatekeepers"
3. costs	Financial – fees, living expenses, and travel Social-safety, discrimination, ability to adapt
4. environment	Physical climate and climate for studying and socializing
5. geographic proximity	Related to the distance from home country in terms of geography and time
6. social links to the host country	Whether family or friends have studied or lived in the host country

Knowledge and awareness of the host country are considered by Mazzarol, Kemp, and Savery (1997) to be the foundation in which the students' decision making process is built on. They noted four variables which create the students' knowledge and awareness of the host country. These variables include a high international profile and easy access to information on its education services as well as a reputation for quality education and recognized qualifications. Institutions through recruiting channels can influence knowledge and awareness. Efforts like the *Study Illinois* Consortium provide one type of

channel, which creates awareness of the institution's home state as an international study destination.

Based upon the research on international students at community college by Zeszotarski (2003) and Doku (2007), knowledge and awareness of community colleges appear to be limited. Doku found the influence of friends and family to be a strong enough pull that the students did not feel the need to conduct their own research in order to make the decisions regarding what U.S. community college to attend. Similar results were found in a comparative study between graduate and undergraduate international students from India by University of Melbourne researcher Sameena Ahmad. In this study, Ahmad (2006) found the undergraduates had less thought-out plans than the graduate students and relied much more heavily on interacting with others who possessed first hand experience. Ahmad's study suggests a difference in maturity level between the undergraduate and graduate student. However, it could be argued that more extensive planning is required for those students seeking advance degrees in a particular discipline.

Personal recommendations and social links to the host countries were cited by both community college researchers Zeszotarski (2003) and Doku (2007) as significant factors for students in their decision making. Mazzarol, Soutar, and Thein (2000) hypothesized that as the push to leave the home country lessens as a result of economic prosperity and/or political stability, the pull forces in particular the influence of family and friends become increasing more important. As Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) explain, "word of mouth referral is one of the most powerful forms of promotion that international education institutions can use" (p. 9).

Subsequent studies have pointed to word of mouth to be a primary factor in international students' decisions. This was confirmed by Griffith University's Institute for Higher Education's Ching Huei Chen and Craig Zimitat (2006) study of international students from Taiwan and Thailand's Ministry of Education's Nattavud Pimpa (2002) investigating Thai students looking to study internationally. V.R Gray (2007) of the University of Otago in New Zealand studied the influence of word of mouth for Asian international students to examine how the perceived sources of referral information created credibility and content about their prospective study destinations. The study conducted by Gray on Malaysian and Chinese students found the form of the personal recommendations varies by countries. Therefore, Malaysian students tended to look to family and friends for referrals, while Chinese students looked toward their teachers. Gray saw this as more of a political than cultural difference. Gray attributes this difference to Malaysia's more extensive history of international involvement with the Asia-Pacific post WWII Colombo Plan, post-colonial ties, and world economic involvement. Moreover, Gray's (2007) research illustrates even in cases where the home country had been historically more insular politically and economically, international students still sought out personal sources for recommendations such as teachers.

Word of mouth recommendations are especially valued for U.S. community colleges, which lack the global recognition of U.S. universities. The influence of these personal recommendations on the international students at the suburban and rural colleges participating in this study will be examined to see how they shaped the decision making process and their knowledge of community colleges as well as whether a difference is evident by the geographical setting of the school.

The location of the U.S. colleges itself can be another important pull factor for international students including such designations as urban, suburban and rural. Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) research showed location factors like climate or its perception of being an exciting destination for study cited 20% more often than the influence of family and friends. Earlier research from Fredrick T. Leong and William E. Sedlacek (1989) of the University of Maryland on students attending their institution in College Park, Maryland showed geographic location to be a significant factor along side recommendations and the quality of the program. Students at Santa Monica Community College interviewed for Zeszotarski's (2003) study commented on the college's location being well-positioned geographically to the entertainment industry and an appealing climate being factors for them. For Doku's (2007) study, the colleges' location near family and friends was important for the international students. Interestingly, Doku's study did not note any distinct differences between the urban and suburban settings in being a factor for the students' decision to attend their institution of choice. Doku suggests the suburban and urban location could have been perceived by the students as being part of the same geographic location.

Research on international students at rural community colleges is limited. One such study was done with international students attending the rural Whyalla campus of the University of South Australia by Bronwyn Ellis, Janet Sawyer, Rod Gill, John Medlin, and Digby Wilson (2005). They concluded that factors which initially pull students to the rural location such as easier access to faculty and smaller class sizes could be later perceived as push factors such as a small campus and few facilities once they arrive.

When University of Pennsylvania researcher Claire Jansen Klieger (2005) conducted her post 9-11 research on international students' reasons for selecting to attend a four year liberal arts college in rural Pennsylvania, the findings included the security on campus. The participants in her research described the sense of safety as the institution's small size and its distance from a large urban area. Data for this study was collected nearly seven years after September 11, 2001 and concerns for public safety are still present. Security could be a pull or push factor for students in their selection of countries and institutions. Colleges already use the condition of safety in promoting their institution. Interesting to note, one of the schools selected for this study mentions the safety of the rural location as a strength on their homepage link from the *Study Illinois* consortium website.

Despite its wide spread use, push-pull theory has critics. It has been criticized for being limited. As a theory for migration patterns, it has been argued that it does not take individual characteristics into consideration (Peyton, 2005). One example of this was a study conducted by China Normal University –Shanghai professor Zou Weichang (2003) during his time as a visiting scholar at the University of Pennsylvania on Chinese students attending four year schools. Weichang pointed to the student's own ambition as a major factor with family and friend playing a more passive role. Critics have cited as another weakness of the theory is its presupposition that the push-pull forces are a dichotomy when there could be a third country involved (Petersen, 1978). Still the push-pull theory's longevity speaks to the very strength of this theory's application in scholarly research.

In summary, the literature notes that the characteristics of the community college itself can be a pull as can be the reputation of U.S. higher education abroad (Doku, 2007; Ewing, 1992; Obst & Forster, 2006; Zeszotarski, 2003; Zikopoulos & Barber, 1986). Family and friends have been brought forth as important pull and also push factors (Chen & Zimitat, 2006; Doku, 2007; Mazzarol, Soutar, Smart, & Choo, 2001; Pimpa, 2002; Weicheng, 2003). Elements of cost (Agarwal & Winkler, 1985; Doku, 2007; Mazzarol, Kemp, & Savery, 1997; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Zeszotarski, 2003;) and environment (Doku, 2007; Ellis, et. al., 2005; Jansen Klieger, 2005; Leong & Sedlacek, 1989; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Zeszotarski, 2003) resonate in the international students' decision making process. As Chen and Zimitat (2006) noted, the various push-pull factors are interdependent and it is this combination of factors coupled with access to resources and attitudes toward the host country that generate a decision. The information and insights from previous research on the push-pull forces influencing international students illuminates the array of elements which international students may consider in making their decision to attend a community college.

World Culture Theory

The concept of globalization has widespread impact on everyone. Whether globalization is embraced, tolerated, or rejected, a response to globalization is necessary for nation-states, institutions, and individuals alike. Globalization represents a convergence of global elements creating a global stage in which this concept is played out.

Globalization as a term is elusive to define. Harvard economist David E. Bloom (2004) believes “globalization refers to the process whereby countries become more integrated via movements of goods, capital, labor, and ideas” (p. 59). Social scientist Arjun Appaduri (2005), currently a professor at the New School in New York City, understood globalization, “as a particular contemporary configuration in the relationship between capital and the nation-state” (p. 17). Appaduri (1996) sees the process of cultural globalization moving through flowscapes, which share a common trait of being unpredictable and disjuncted. James Mittleman (2000), professor of international affairs at American University, describes globalization as “a political response to the expansion of market power” (p. 6). In Mittleman’s book, *Globalization Syndrome: Transformation and Resistance*, he remarks on how polarizing the term globalization has become as a result of its relationship to the global market economy. There are those who perceive globalization as a positive step for the world as a whole and others who view it negatively as a post-colonial form of hegemony. This study is not intended to judge the concept of globalization. However, globalization’s pervasiveness must be taken into account as an element in the students’ decision making process.

Just as there are multiple definitions of globalization, few scholars can agree upon globalization’s origins. Globalization elements can be seen throughout time from ancient Chinese civilization through the middle ages’ Hanseatic League in Northern Europe and the latter spread of European and American colonization. Despite this, globalization’s presence in today’s world is unquestioned. As former Director of Centre for Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation (CSGR) at the University of Warwick Jan Aart Scholte (2000) states, “only since the 1960’s has globality figured continually,

comprehensively and centrally in the lives of a large proportion of humanity” (p. 87). Moreover, globalization’s penetration creates a world which is less clearly defined by borders and culture. As Harvard professors Marcelo M. Suarez and Doris Sommer (in Suarez-Orozco and Qin-Hilliard, 2004) note, “Globalization decisively unmakes the coherence that the modernist project of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century nation-state promised to deliver-the neat fit between territory, language, and identity” (p. 3). This age of increased globalization provides the backdrop for students looking to pursue their post-secondary studies internationally.

Globalization is driven by the interplay of relationships in an increasingly condensing global arena. For international students, these relationships forge perceptions and understandings which will influence their decision making process. Lechner and Boli (2000) in their influential text *the Globalization Reader* offer an explanation of globalization, which guides this study.

The world is becoming a single place, in which different institutions function as parts of one system and distant people share common understanding of living together on one planet. The world society has a culture; it instills in many people a budding consciousness of living in a world society. To links and institutions we therefore add culture and consciousness. Globalization is the process that fitfully brings these elements of world society together. (p. 1)

Research on international students indicates the forces of globalization do contribute to the decision making process. Therefore, inclusion of a theory which attends to the impact of globalization is necessary. World culture theory contributes to the theoretical framework in this study by providing a lens to view the dynamic relationships between

the individual students and their interactions on a global scale. World culture theory illuminates the influence of contemporary contexts of place and time on the decision making process of individuals as they strive to define themselves.

Earlier studies on international students drew on past paradigms in particular Immanuel Wallerstein's World System Theory model. This theory presupposes a hierarchy of nation-states in which those nation-states with the most political, economic, and cultural influence were situated in the center or "core." Those nation-states outside the core in the "periphery" would then strive to move toward the center. Based on this model, it was thought that students studied abroad as a way to move laterally from a country on the periphery to one in the core where the students would benefit from a superior education (Agarwal & Winkler, 1985; McMahon, 1992). This theoretical concept resonated during the dyadic backdrop of the Cold War period.

As the global political situation evolved, a new theoretical framework was needed to address a less clearly defined world. David Hartley (2003) of the University of Dundee noted a theoretical shift occurring just before the end of the Cold War. Hartley described this as a transition away from the "old modernity" of the nation-state to a more global sensibility. Contemporary studies on international students enrolling in U.S. higher education institutions reflect this different perspective.

One of the first studies to bring this to light was research conducted on European international students in the European Credit Transfer System by Freidhelm Maiworm, Director of Gesellschaft für Empirische Studien (Center for Urban Studies-author's translation) and Ulrich Teichler, Professor of Education at the University of Kassel in Germany, in 1995. Their research indicated the reasons for students to study abroad to

be more internalized and holistic. Reasons given included self-development, a desire for an academic abroad experience and the desire to understand the host country.

This current state of globalization challenges some previously held beliefs on international students. One example is the belief in which international students are driven to study abroad due to educational deficiencies in international students' home countries as popularized by Lakshima G. Rao (1979) in his book *the Brain Drain and Foreign Students*. A 2006 survey by The Institute of International Education (IIE) revealed a lack of facilities in the students' home country as one of the least cited reasons for a student to study internationally in the U.S. (Obst and Forster, 2006). Rather, the IIE survey showed the most cited reasons given by the 420 international students at 24 post-secondary institutions including community colleges to be more related to a global identity. These reasons included improving chances for an international career, an opportunity to develop their personality/become more independent, and experience new ways of thinking (Obst and Forster, 2006).

The importance of incorporating a theory encompassing the current state of globalization can not be overstated. As University of Western Australia's Michael Singh (2005) laments,

a significant gap in all of this research into internationalization of higher education is the missed opportunities to engage contemporary theories of cultural globalization and insights they offer into the history, ideological and local practices of internationalizing higher education. (p. 10)

World culture theory is best suited to addressing the needs of this study.

World culture theory as it is used in this study is derived from the work of University of Aberdeen Professor of Sociology Roland Robertson in his 1992 book, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*. Robertson's theory believed the more structured Marxist based World-System theory as being unable to account for the dynamic process of globalization and the role of the individual. At the center of his theory is globalization, which Robertson (1992) defines as "a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole" (p. 8). This theory does not propose there is a single overarching world view, but instead envisions multiple, at times transvergent, views being integrated but not necessarily in synch. World culture theory is not about "globalization" in the sense of "McDonaldization," but more a response to it which seeks to recognize and incorporate local culture rather than absorb and dispose of it.

This theory moves beyond the 20th century understanding of the nation-state as it subscribes to a borderless model recognizing the global interdependence of contemporary society. Robertson is quick to note that, "there is nothing to suggest that the nationally organized society, more specifically the state, is about to wither away" (p. 184). Fazal Rizvi (2000) of the University of Illinois' Department of Educational Policy Studies argues that the nation-states have never been homogeneous entities on the global stage. Over 20 years earlier, Cornell University's Benedict Anderson made this very point in his 1983 illuminating work *Imagined Communities*, which chronicles the evolution of the modern nation-state. The global communities of today, however, are quite real even if their range or diversity and degree of abstraction present challenges beyond our imagination.

World culture theory contains several different elements in which the participants give meaning to the world and their role in it. Four elements (relativization, emulation, glocalization, and interpenetration) have relevancy with international students and their decision making process.

Relativisation

Robertson (1992) describes *relativization* as “meant to indicate the ways in which, as globalization proceeds, challenges are increasingly presented to the stability of particular perspectives on, and collective and individual participation in, the overall globalization process” (p. 29). In relativization, individuals and institutions are influenced by others surrounding them. There is a pressure then to align culturally with other parts of the world the participants come in contact with. Robertson (1992) identified four main components of the “global-human circumstance,” as national societies or nation-states, the world system of those societies, individuals as oneself, and humankind. The inclusion of humankind in his model is a unique component which Robertson and Penn State Sociology Professor JoAnn Chirico (2000) suggest has historically been overlooked. All four players interact to create contemporary world culture, which is “not passive and inert but highly dynamic in its own right” (Meyer, Boli, et al. 1997, p. 168).

International students engaged in relativization are likely to absorb the influence of their family, friends, local and national culture, and their country’s place in larger world system. This influence is then reflective on their personal identity and decisions they make. Relativization is exemplified in Fazal Rizvi’s 2000 study on Malaysian students studying in Australia. In this study conducted when Rizvi was affiliated with Monash

University in Australia, students identified the global and local forces influencing their decision making process. The five most stated reasons for coming to Australia for studying were the use of the English language, the status of being overseas, a family tradition, an interest in the global economy, and an exposure to all things foreign as a way to become more competitive in the global market (Rizvi, 2000). The use of English, global economy, and exposure to all things foreign indicates a global influence. The status of being overseas and the family tradition hints at a larger international academic diaspora with more local influence. The convergence of these components contributed to the international students' decision to study internationally.

Emulation

A key characteristic of world culture theory is its plurality. The theory does not subscribe to one emerging global culture, but rather a *mélange* of cultures. The element of *emulation* involves the platform where cultures can be compared and selectively incorporated. Described by John Tomlinson (1999), Director of the Centre for Research in International Communication and Culture at the Nottingham Trent University, in his book *Globalization and Culture* as a “deterritorialisation of culture,” this aspect of world culture theory is enhanced by increasing mobility like that experienced by international students. Tomlinson describes this trait as “gradual and constant alterations in the cognitive maps or people, in their loyalties and in their frames of social and cultural reference” (p. 34).

International students seek out emulation in their efforts to create their global identity. Students can selectively incorporate cultural aspects of their host country they

wish to have. Research studies have shown international students motivated to study abroad to develop a “global understanding” (Obst and Forster, 2006; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Rizvi, 2000). In a study conducted by University of Western Australia’s Tim Mazzarol and Geoffrey N. Soutar (2002), 80% of Indonesian students and 91% of Chinese students went abroad to develop better cultural understanding. These studies highlight the students’ individual needs in globalization, which Robertson (1992) calls, “accentuation of the individual.”

Glocalisation

An appealing premise of the world culture theory is one of incorporating local culture rather than dismissing it. According to Professor of Sociology at Nottingham Trent University Mike Featherstone (1995), this is the most important feature, “not to produce homogeneity but to familiarize us with the greater diversity, the extensive range of local cultures (p. 86).” Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2000), Global Sociology Professor at the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign, describes this operation of both local and global viewpoints as *glocalization* as in the phrase, “think globally, act locally.” Through glocalization, an isomorphism of globalization and localization, the effects of global pressures can be subdued by merging with local practices. In terms of the individual, Robertson (1992) describes it as a complex identity of sharing global aspects and asserting local identities.

Research on international students reflect an interest in a global understanding (Maiworm and Teichler, 1995; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Obst and Forster, 2006; Rizvi, 2000) or global identity (Obst and Forster, 2006; Rizvi, 2000; Zeszotarski, 2003).

Based on these findings, international students are not rejecting one culture over another. Rather, they are incorporating the newly experienced cultures with their own.

Institutions as a whole respond to glocalisation. Community colleges, whose name reflects its local focus, have responded to globalization in part by increasing efforts in recruiting international students. John Levin (2001) sees the multifaceted utility of globalization as parallel with the multifaceted nature of community colleges. In his book, *Globalizing the Community College*, Levin (2001) cites the trend of globalization being entered into the community college mission statements and brought into the college curriculum.

Interpenetration

Robertson (1992) envisions *interpenetration* as an element in world culture theory where there is, “a form of institutionalization of the two-fold process involving the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism” (p. 102). The individual develops adaptability for incorporating the universals and particulars which continually shape his/her identity. Nederveen Pieterse (2000) posits that,

multiple identities and decentring of the social subject are grounded in the ability of the individuals to avail themselves of several organizations at the same time. Thus, globalization is the framework for the amplification and diversification of ‘sources of the self.’ (p. 104)

International students are fully immersed in interpenetration as they grapple with the multiple identities from the home and host countries. The process of being placed in an unfamiliar setting can be insightful not just for what is gained about the host culture but

also what is gained about oneself. Zeszotarski (2003) study on community college students found students' motivation to develop a global identity as a factor for them to study internationally. She describes this motivation as developing their "intercultural adaptability," the ability to function beyond language to the more unspoken cultural elements. The results of the Institute of International Education 2006 survey (Obst and Forster, 2006) highlights the importance of global self awareness of the students who cited "experience a new way of thinking" as a important factor in their decision to study abroad.

Some critics have viewed the world culture theory as merely masking global hegemony and being too rooted in western culture. Although Robertson (1992) acknowledges his own western background, he argues that traditionally perceived "Western" concepts like individualism are irrevocably embedded relative to globalization.

As an emerging contemporary theory, there are few research studies engaging world culture theory. Roger Dale (2000), University of Auckland Professor of Education, attributes this lack of research to the abstract characteristics of world culture theory, which make it elusive to measure. Although Dale faults the world culture theory for not providing greater depth and standardized terminology, he credits the deficiency in details as maintaining the nature of the theory. For world culture theory to be truly all encompassing, it can not be tethered to limits of specificity. Even with such limitations, research in the field manifests this theory.

With international students' acute awareness of the world and their active involvement in it, world culture theory provides a needed lens to view the factors

international students weigh in deciding to attend a community college in our contemporary context.

Cognitive Decision Making Theory

Although factors which enter into the decision making process are central to this research, the process itself must be considered. Despite the importance of the decision making process, University of Madrid researchers Jose Maria Cubillo, Joaquin Sanchez, and Julio Cervino (2006) posit that “there is scarce literature analyzing the decision making process of prospective international students in general” (p. 102). Decision making theories as well are numerous and range from quantitative models of probability to qualitative forms which focus on the process or the agent/decision maker.

The basis of many decision-making theories comes from classic decision-making theory rooted in John Dewey’s formulation of problem solving. This process involves identifying and assessing the situation, identifying and weighing the alternatives, reaching a decision and acting upon it, and finally reviewing the decision. The pragmatic design of the classic decision making theory can best be described as an optimizing strategy, one which when fully executed incorporates all needed inputs (Tarter & Hoy, 1996). Decision making in a natural setting is rarely able to achieve the classic levels as it is described. According to Professors of Educational Administration C. John Tarter, St. John’s University, and Wayne K. Hoy, the Ohio State University, (1996) classic decision making theory, “makes demands on human cognition that simply cannot be met” (p. 212). Yet the process of decision making still exist even though it may lack the formal structure of classic decision making. In reality, inputs vary in frequency and emphasis or are never

fully realized. The influences of these inputs are dependent on the variable of human cognition.

One decision making theory which does emphasis human cognition is cognitive decision making theory. This theory follows a socio-cognitive approach and views decision making as a human mental process which presupposes intelligence on behalf of the agent or decision maker. The decision making process is perceived as recursive and incremental. It is a qualitative theory of decision-making which does not encompass numerical calculations based algorithms dependent on established conditions, but instead adheres to “essential or meta-properties of the socio-cognitive individual and organizational decision making” according to Adam Maria Gadomski (2006), principle researcher in meta-knowledge and socio-cognitive engineering for the Italian public agency Ente per le Nuove Tecnologie (ENEA). Cognitive decision making theory matches with the intentions of this research in that it focuses on the individual context of the decision making process.

In cognitive decision making theory, the process begins when a choice is needed and no preconceived solution exists (Gadomski, 2006). The individual decision maker employs three sources in reaching a decision: information, preferences, and knowledge. By this definition, information is data provided from outside the individual’s existing knowledge. In essence, knowledge is what the individual knows, preferences are what the individual feels, and information is what the individual has learned. In analyzing the students’ decision-making process, differentiating the factors utilized by the students and identifying the source will be included in this study.

Some of the aforementioned researchers analyzed the cognitive decision making process of the international students with mixed results. Through surveys, Mazzarol, Soutar, and Thein (2000) identified the decision-making process for international students in three stages which they had to complete:

1. They must decide if they want to study internationally or locally;
2. They must decide what country to study in;
3. They must select their school.

This linear process follows the flow of classic decision making. The 2006 Institute of International Education (IIE) survey found students did follow a similar process (Obst and Forster, 2006). Students were asked to identify from the choices of world region, country, and host school what they first decided upon when they knew they would study abroad. From the 117 students surveyed at the bachelor degree level, which would include community college students, 37% decided on the country and then the school and 25% decided on the region first followed by country and then school (Obst and Forster, 2006). Only 17% of bachelor level students selected the institution first without deciding on country or region prior to their decision compared with 29% of doctoral students (Obst and Forster, 2006). Pimpa (2002) in her study of Thai students studying abroad found several variations to the point that no set decision making process could be identified. The fact that Pimpa could not identify a common process even when studying a single cultural grouping speaks to the challenges of defining this cognitive decision making process. As a case in point, Cubillo, Sanchez, Cervino, and Olcese's (2005) regression analysis of international students' decision making process within Europe could not show a statistically meaningful relationship with four major factors (personal reasons, country

image, institution image, and program evaluation) and the student's choice of destination. Still, they contend that students make critical decisions early on based on the images they see (Cubillo, Sanchez, et al., 2005). Chen and Zimitat (2006) posited that the greater positive attitudes, influences, and resources international students have for a destination, the more likely a positive result would occur

Although it is acknowledged that all decisions have both internal and external inputs such as family members or relatives living abroad, in terms of decision making theories the process described in this study is an individual one made by the international student attending an Illinois community college. A collective decision making process would involve coming to consensus, identifying the roles of the participants, and other elements not relevant to this study nor predominant in the process of deciding to come to a community college according to these models. Even in the cases which Doku (2007) found on international students relying heavily on the recommendations of family and friends, there was still a point in time in which a cognitive decision was made based on what the individual perceives as sufficient information.

Scholars on the social transition of international students believe there is an added transition level for students in rural environments, so the possibility of a unique step in the decision-making process for international students at rural community colleges could exist. Knowledge of this could be helpful to rural community colleges serving international students. This was the case according to Australian education researchers Stuart Levy, Monique Osborn, and Margaret Plunkett (2003) from their findings of students at the rural Gippsland campus of Monash University. They reason since most international students do not come from rural areas there is an added transition level in

the decision making process. A related study of international students attending rural University of Sydney Orange campus (USO) by Kathryn Edgeworth of Charles Sturt University and John Eiseman of the University of Sydney (2007) found students selected the rural location because they were unable to gain access to into their preferred school and came with the intention of transferring. Further, the study showed that students were not completely aware of the rural location of the campus assuming a location to be more a suburb of the major metropolitan area of Sydney when in fact it was five hours away by train in the Australian “bush” or countryside. The international students in Edgeworth and Eiseman study of a rural university carried “with them an attitude that to place that clearly marks them as visitors in the rural landscape” (Edgeworth and Eiseman, 2007, p. 11). The decision of the University of Sydney Orange students to study in a rural setting appears to be more accidental in the sense that students did not cognitively select the school because of its rural location but more in spite of its location.

Summary

These three theories together allow for a fuller understanding of the international students’ decision to attend a U.S. community college. The internal cognitive decision making process, the external pull and push forces, and the internalized desire for global understanding all play a predominant role in the existing literature on international students studying abroad. This study’s focus specifically on community colleges’ international students seeks to address a need and a considerable gap in the current literature. According to Pimpa (2002), “research should focus on particular choices and identify what factors could influence each choice (p.218).” Research from both the

United States and abroad speak of the influence of family and friends on the decision making process. How these external influences factor into the international students' decision-making process will be explored.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research Method

The purpose of the study and the driving questions determined the rationale for the research method, selection of participants as well as the data collection and analysis techniques employed. This research study is an exploratory qualitative case study situated in the interpretive paradigm. The purpose of this study is to identify what factors contributed to international students' decision making process to attend U.S. community colleges. Semi-structured interviews with international students were conducted and the data were interpreted as it related to the research questions and any a priori themes from the literature. A theoretical framework that combines push-pull theory, world culture theory, and cognitive decision-making theory is the lens through which this study was viewed.

Qualitative Research

To determine what factors contribute to international students' decisions to attend a community college, a qualitative design has been chosen. Qualitative research is contextually based, focused on the process, exploratory, meaning seeking, and interpretive. These characteristics found in qualitative research are well suited to address the research questions posed by this study.

Qualitative research grew out of social science as a way to understand phenomena and can be described as a holistic approach to research. Authors of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (2005),

describe qualitative research as coming out of “a complex historical field” with eight different historical moments and argue that “any definition of qualitative research must work within this complex historical field” (p. 3). Under this stipulation, they offer a generic definition of qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3).

The characteristics of qualitative research have been noted by various research scholars. Although there is no definitive set of characteristics, certain traits are commonly identified. Another leading expert in qualitative education research, Eliot Eisner (1997), listed six features of qualitative research. These features could be divided evenly between a focus on the researcher and the nature of the research. Eisner notes that the researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative research constructing meaning from his/her interpretation and using his/her own voice to present the research. Other qualities include attention to detail over generalization, based in the setting, and the way in which qualitative research is evaluated. Robert C. Bogdan and Sari Knopp Biklin (2007) in their book *Qualitative Research for Education* identified a similar set of five features of qualitative research: naturalistic, descriptive data, concern with process, inductive, and meaning making. They clarify that qualitative research studies might reflect these features to different degrees or may not even possess one or more of the features, yet it is the degree in which the research demonstrates these five features which makes it qualitative. This research includes all of the five features as expounded by Bogdan and Biklin.

From its earliest origins qualitative research has been about collecting data firsthand with the researcher undertaking the initiative to engage study participants in the

field rather than bringing the participants into a controlled environment. This focus on the participants within the context of their setting is described as naturalistic. As Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman (1999), authors of *Designing Qualitative Research*, point out qualitative researchers are, “intrigued with the complexity of social interaction as expressed in daily life and with the meaning the participants themselves attribute to these interactions” (p. 20). The naturalistic traits of qualitative research enable the researcher to observe the daily life of the participants in a setting which is part of the participants’ life. This feature suggests human behavior and setting are intrinsically linked in such a way that greater meaning can be derived by observing the participants in their environment. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe this, “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). This study was conducted at the community colleges where the participants attend and thus is appropriate for qualitative research.

Qualitative research places greater focus on the process than the product. The research question posed by this study already acknowledges the product of international students selecting community colleges. According to adult education research scholars Sharan B. Merriam and Edwin L. Simpson (1995), “if you want to understand a phenomenon, uncover the meaning a situation has for those involved, or delineate a process-how things happen-then a qualitative design would be most appropriate” (p. 99). Eisner (1997) spoke of the instrumental utility of the qualitative research,

guides, more than maps, are closely associated with utilities of qualitative studies...They are designed to enable the traveler to anticipate (and to secure or

avoid) particular encounters on the journey...Guides call our attention to aspects of the situation or place we might otherwise miss. (p.59)

The intention in this study is to explore the process of how international students enrolled in community colleges made their decision by identifying the contributing factors in this process.

Another characteristic of qualitative research is its inductive nature. Unlike quantitative research that follows the scientific positivist model of establishing a hypothesis and then proving or disproving the anticipated result, qualitative has no preconceived outcomes of the research. Rather than prove theory, Merriam and Simpson (1995) assert, “qualitative research is an inductive strategy which allows us to develop theory” (p. 97). In this sense, qualitative research is especially helpful in exploring areas in which little research has been done. It allows for the creation of new insight and understanding.

Qualitative research provides a holistic approach that allows for multiple interpretive practices and a dimension of detail. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) likened the qualitative researcher to a “bricoleur” or quilt maker.

Accordingly, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices, hoping always to get a better understanding of subject matter at hand. It is understood, however, that each practice makes the world visible in a different way. (p. 3-4)

The researcher must take these multiple practices and construct meaning from them. The researcher used a variety of different interpretive practices to explore the research topic that included participant interviews, observations, field notes, and researcher journals.

Qualitative research looks to understand how others formulate meaning. In this sense, the data are the viewpoints of the participants. According to Bodgan and Biklen (2007), “qualitative researchers set up strategies and procedures to enable them to consider experiences from the informants’ perspective” (p.8). The perceptions that the participants share about their experience and their decision making process formulate the data used in determining the factors influencing the students’ decision to attend a U.S. community college.

Interpretive Paradigm

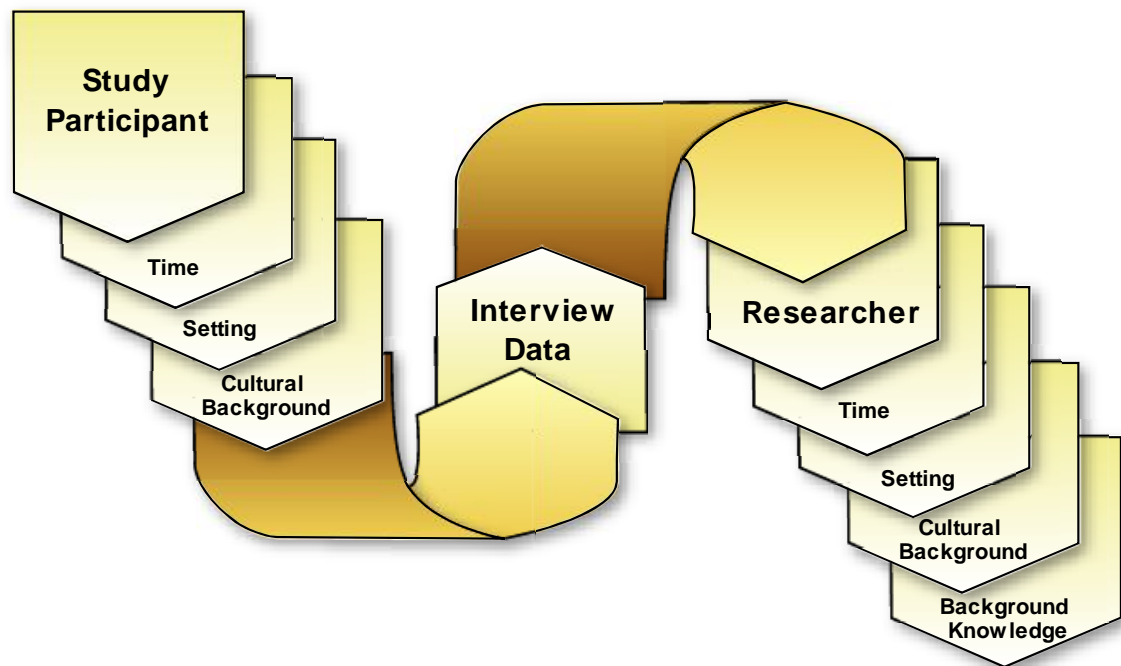
The research design of this study sits in the interpretive paradigm of qualitative research. The interpretive paradigm looks to analyze phenomena through the understanding of the participants. According to a leading authority on the interpretive paradigm, Thomas A. Schwandt (2000),

From an interpretivist point of view, what distinguishes human (social) action from the movement of physical objects is that the former is inherently meaningful. Thus, to understand a particular social action (e.g., friendship, voting, marrying, teaching), the inquirer must grasp the meanings that constitute the action. (p. 191)

Actions taken by an individual may have different meanings that are understood or interpreted in different ways by the individual taking the action and others who observe the action. Certain elements shape the meanings. The time, setting, cultural background of both the actor and the observer contribute to interpreting the meaning of the action. In the case of the decision of an international student to study at a community college, the interpretative paradigm in qualitative research allows the researcher to explore the context

in which the student makes his/her decision. The interpretive paradigm assists the researcher to explore, identify, and gain understanding of the cognitive decision making process of the international student. Figure 3 illustrates this complexity shaping meaning in the interpretive paradigm for this study.

Figure 3. Interpretive paradigm as it applies to the study.



International students may select to study at US community colleges because of a variety of reasons all situated in their personal socio/cultural context. According to Jerry W. Willis (2007) in his book *Foundations of Qualitative Research*, “interpretivists believe an understanding of the context in which any form of research is conducted is critical to the interpretation of the data gathered” (p. 98). In this case, qualitative interpretive research allows for the researcher to incorporate the context used in the participant’s decision-making process and utilize the details in regards to data analysis.

With the research encompassing more than one culture, an interpretive approach allows for those cultural nuances to not only be acknowledged in the analysis of the data,

but to provide depth in understanding. The interpretive paradigm has been often used in cross cultural studies because of its usefulness in being inclusive with culture and its aid in comprehending complex interrelationships. Diane Cantrell (1993), a leading education researcher, advocates for the interpretive approach in education research because it is best suited for the complexities of education with its *mélange* of socio-political, economic, and cultural elements. Culture is not limited to ethnicity; social class, gender, politics, religion, geography and other forms contribute to the interpretation of meaning. The cultural component can be global in scope as world culture theory contends. Although the influence of culture is both widespread and deeply entrenched, the role of one's individual culture is not part of this study.

Just as the participants' cultural background creates meaning, the observer's own background contributes to the interpretation. Denzin (2001) views the researcher as the tool when he states that "all inquiry reflects the standpoint of the inquirer" (p. 3). Based on Denzin's perspective, the researcher is the most central to an interpretative design.

Complete objectivity in using an interpretive design is impossible. However, researchers can limit their own bias in the interpretive process. Schwandt (2000) speaks of this neo-Kantian perspective to maintain the subjective meaning of the action by the actor in an objective fashion. Schwandt identifies three steps that can be employed assisting to achieve this:

1. reconstruct the self-understandings of actors engaged in particular actions and accept these understandings;
2. understand the whole – the setting, time, and other contextual elements;
3. maintain an "epistemological understanding of understanding." (p. 193-194)

In the last step, Schwandt describes the “epistemological understanding of understanding” as an intellectual process in which, “the interpreter objectifies (i.e. stands over and against) that which is to be interpreted. And, in that sense, the interpreter remains unaffected by and external to the interpretive process” (p. 194). The researcher implemented measures to develop a confirmability of the data which included member checks, audit trail, and data source triangulation.

Case Study Method

For the purposes of this study, case study was used to examine the factors international students used when making their decision to come to a US community college. Merriam (1998) defines the case study as “an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or social group” (p. 9). One of the leading authorities on case study research, Robert K. Yin (2003), remarked that the case study provides for a comprehensive strategic approach to research, “an all encompassing method – covering the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis” (p. 14).

According to Yin (2003), “a case study is used in many situations to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena” (p.1). Merriam (1998) posits the purpose of the case study as “to develop conceptual strategies or to illustrate, support, or challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to data gathering” (p. 30). As this study’s intent is to explore and identify the factors that go into the decision making process of international students, there are no preconceived findings that the researcher is expecting. To understand this decision

making process, the researcher had to be aware of and receptive to the context in which the decisions were made. The case study, a form of interpretive research, is well suited to examining the details and context in which the students determined they would attend U.S. community colleges.

Case studies are one of the most commonly used forms of social science research (Willis, 2007; Yin 2003). The traits of this research approach lend themselves to address a variety of research questions and wide spread usage. Another authority on the case study approach, Robert E. Stake (2000) describes, “case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied” (p. 435). Stake (2000) places his emphasis on the word “case” and sees the case study as both a “process of inquiry” and a “product of that inquiry” (p. 436). Guba and Lincoln (1981) see the choice of what is to be studied driving the composition of the case study when they say that “the content of a case study is determined chiefly by its purpose, which typically is to reveal the properties of the class to which the instance being studied belongs” (p. 371). In this sense, the participants of the study must be purposeful to the research question. Although consensus on the semantic classification of the case studies is elusive, the characteristics of the case study are useful for exploring the research questions posed by this study.

The case study centers around collecting detailed data on the phenomenon being studied. This format allows the researcher to explore in depth a particular action or event. A detailed description of the phenomenon is an essential property of a qualitative case study according to Merriam (1998). Additionally, Willis (2007) cited “richness of detail” as an advantage of the case study (p. 240). All aspects of the research questions can be explored with a case study. This allows for the researcher to direct his attention to areas

not previously concerned at the time of designing the study as well as examining multiple variables influencing the research question. As Merriam and Simpson (1995) put it, “a case study tends to be concerned with investigating many, if not all, variables in a single unit” (p. 108). This attention to detail is beneficial in exploring the myriad of factors which influenced the students’ decision to attend US community college.

The case study can offer a “snapshot” of its contextual aspects of time and setting. According to Yin (2003) the case study is ideal for examining “a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). Since little is known about why international students come to the community college, the case study is appropriate for this research. The students’ current presence on the campus is related to their decision to attend and thus all the interviews were conducted on the community colleges where they attended.

To bring in these details and contemporary context, the case study lends itself to a holistic understanding of the phenomenon. This does not mean to generalize the data, but rather to look at the data as a whole. As Willis (2007) describes the holistic nature of the case study, “it...supports the idea that much of what we can know about human behavior is best understood as lived experience in the social context” (p. 240). Related to the interpretive nature of the case study, Merriam and Simpson (1995) assert that “the case study seeks holistic description and interpretation” (p. 108). In examining the variety of push-pull forces and influences of world culture on the students, the holistic aspect of the case study provides a level of *versehen* (understanding) of the research question which other methodologies would not be able to achieve.

Case studies are uniquely adaptive. As Merriam (1998) sees it, “the case study is a basic design that can accommodate a variety of disciplinary perspectives” (p. 11). This trait of the case study is particularly important for the theoretical framework selected for this study since the theories come from a variety of disciplines: push-pull theory from economics, world culture theory from sociology, and cognitive decision-making theory from psychology. A multi-theoretical lens can be used with a case study whereas such a diverse lens would be problematic in other research designs. As further evidence of its adaptability, case studies can be more readily transposed into a readable descriptive narrative (Stake, 2000). The exposition of understanding of the phenomenon is what Merriam (1998) considers being one of the essential properties of the qualitative case study.

Selection of Participants

Participation in this study, both the community college site and the international students was based on selection criteria appropriate to answer the study’s purpose. Additionally, the Illinois community colleges, where the participants were drawn from, were selected based on shared characteristics which are further detailed in this section. A discussion of the Illinois community college system, the *Study Illinois* Program, and the criteria that defines rural and suburban community colleges is presented.

Selection Criteria

The participants involved in this study are international students on an F-1 visa that had completed at least one semester at their community college and were not enrolled in pre-college English course work such as ESL at the time of the interview. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCED) defines international students in the U.S. as those who “are neither U.S. citizens, immigrants, nor refugees, thus excluding permanent residents” (ACE, 2006). This definition will be employed for the study. References in this study to international students refer only to those students on F-1 student visas, not students who might have other visa status or different residency arrangements such as refugees, migrant workers, etc. The three selection criteria for participants are found in Table 8.

Table 8. Participant Selection Criteria

CRITERION	DEFINITION
Criterion 1	Visa Type : F-1 Full-time International Student
Criterion 2	Semesters at Community College: in 2 nd , 3 rd , or 4 th semester at the participant’s community college
Criterion 3	Area of Study: Any area except ESL

Criterion 1

The first criterion for participation was the student needed to have a F-1 student visa. According to Institute for International Education, 86.6% of all international

students in the U.S. are on F-type visas (IIE, 2006). International students apply to the U.S. higher education institution of their choice. The institution such as an Illinois community college issues the federal I-20 form. This form notifies the U.S. government that the student has been accepted by the institution. The student then goes to the U.S. Embassy or Consulate to be granted an F-1 status visa. The visa allows the student to enter the U.S. as a full-time student of the I-20 issuing institution. This study is only focused on the F-1 type, the primary student, and not F-2, accompanying family member. The F-2 student's visa status is directly tied to the F-1 student's visa and they are not required to attend college full-time, so their decisions to study at a community college would be influenced by this difference in visa classification. However, an F-1 student could have been a former F-2 as was the case for two participants in the study.

Criterion 2

The second criterion used for selecting participants is that the international student has completed at least one semester and be finishing their second, third, or fourth semester. This particular point was chosen because the students would be at a point in their personal development living abroad in which they would be more reflective, but yet not too far removed for the decision making process. According to cultural psychology expert Paul Pederson in his book the *Five Stages of Culture Shock* (1995), the students should be at a point of autonomy or perhaps still in a reintegration stage by the end of the first year in which they have growing self confidence and a greater feeling of control in their adopted environment. The inclusion of selection criterion two was supported by all three international student experts in a research focus group, two of which had Master's Degrees in Social Work and collectively 40 years of international student advising. One

of the students that agreed to participate had to be excluded since he did not meet this criterion and therefore, in keeping compliant with the participant selection criteria, he was not a participant in this study.

Criterion 3

Criterion Three excludes students whose expressed goal is English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. This decision was based on previous research studies as well as the information given by the study's focus group of international student experts. The issue of language, in particular English, is a primary concern for this study. There is a greater concern for communication barriers if the student's only intention to study international is for ESL. Secondly, ESL students are tracked differently in most community college programs than degree-seeking students and ESL itself is not viewed as degree seeking. This was supported by the focus group who specifically noted that students attending for the purposes of improving their English language skills have different school options available to them that do not exist for a degree seeking student. Such options would include English language academies and other non-degree issuing institutions. Additionally, the number of countries is limited in which a student could receive a U.S. educational visa for English language study. Each student participant identified a specific field of study other than English for this study.

Sampling

The sampling used for this study was both purposeful and convenient. The study's participants were selected for their purposefulness to the research topic in that they will be attending one of the four community colleges selected for the study. Use of

purposeful sampling criteria is considered most appropriate for qualitative research since it only includes participants most related to the study. According to Merriam (1998), “the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 61). They will be convenient in that they are accessible for this research in a face-to-face format. The conditions that make it favorable to interview the participants in person at their institutions contribute to what can be learned. Stake (2000) notes that in case selection, “my choice would be to examine that case from which we feel we can learn the most. That may mean taking the one most accessible, the one we can spend the most time with” (p. 446).

The international students signed a consent form (see Appendix B) agreeing to participate in the study. In this consent form, the participants are given the title of the research study and the purpose of the study, which identified as, “what factors influence international students to come to a community college in the United States.” The form further explains the recording of the interview and how this data collected will be stored. Participants are notified in the informed consent form that they can discontinue their participation in the research at any time without prejudice. A copy of the form is retained by both the participant and the researcher.

Use of Anonymity

Anonymity was maintained in the study for multiple reasons. Two of the three reasons Yin (2003) gives for the use of anonymity in a case study are applicable in this research: (a) “To protect the real case and its real participants” and (b) to avoid “subsequent action of those who were studied” (p. 158). The use of anonymity is

intended to protect the participants from unforeseen consequences or harm as a result of their involvement. The participants' legal status within the United States is contingent on maintaining their standing as a full time college student. Since the possibility exists for the students' status to be jeopardized, anonymity for the students and their institutions was maintained. Student and institutional anonymity grants the participants a degree of security to avoid compromising the data.

Illinois Community College System

As part of the convenience sampling, Illinois was selected as the study site.

Illinois is fairly representative of the nation as a whole in terms of economics, education, and demographics.

Economics: Illinois has a mix of industry in terms of total gross state product that mirrors that of the nation on the whole according to a fact finding study conducted by the non-profit National Center for Higher Education Management System (2008). Not one industry dominates the state economy, which fluctuates with the national trends. The average Illinoisan has an income within \$3000 of the national average.

Average Income: Illinois \$43,744 U.S. \$40, 677

(U.S. Census agency, 2005).

Education: The education level of Illinoisans resembles that of the nation.

Illinois ranks 27th among all the States in the proportion of the working age population with an associate's degree (National Center for Higher Education

Management System, 2008). The percentage of Graduate Equivalent Degrees (GED) awarded to adults between 25 and 44 years of age as well as students going directly on to college from high school fall close to the national averages.

GED Awarded per 1,000 adults 25-44: Illinois 9.1 U.S. 8.7

(Illinois Board of Higher Education, 2006).

Percentage of students going directly into college from high school:

Illinois 41.7% U.S. 38.9%

(Illinois Board of Higher Education, 2006).

Demographics: The population which Illinois community colleges serve is parallel to the national trends in age, race, and home language. The most recent U.S. Census data available at the time of this study (2007) reflects this resemblance.

Percentage of population under 18: Illinois 25.1% U.S. 24.6%

Percentage of population over 65: Illinois 12.0% U.S. 12.5%

Percentage identified as White: Illinois 79% U.S. 80%

Percentage identified as Black: Illinois 15% U.S. 12%

Percentage identified as Hispanic: Illinois 14.7% U.S. 14.8%

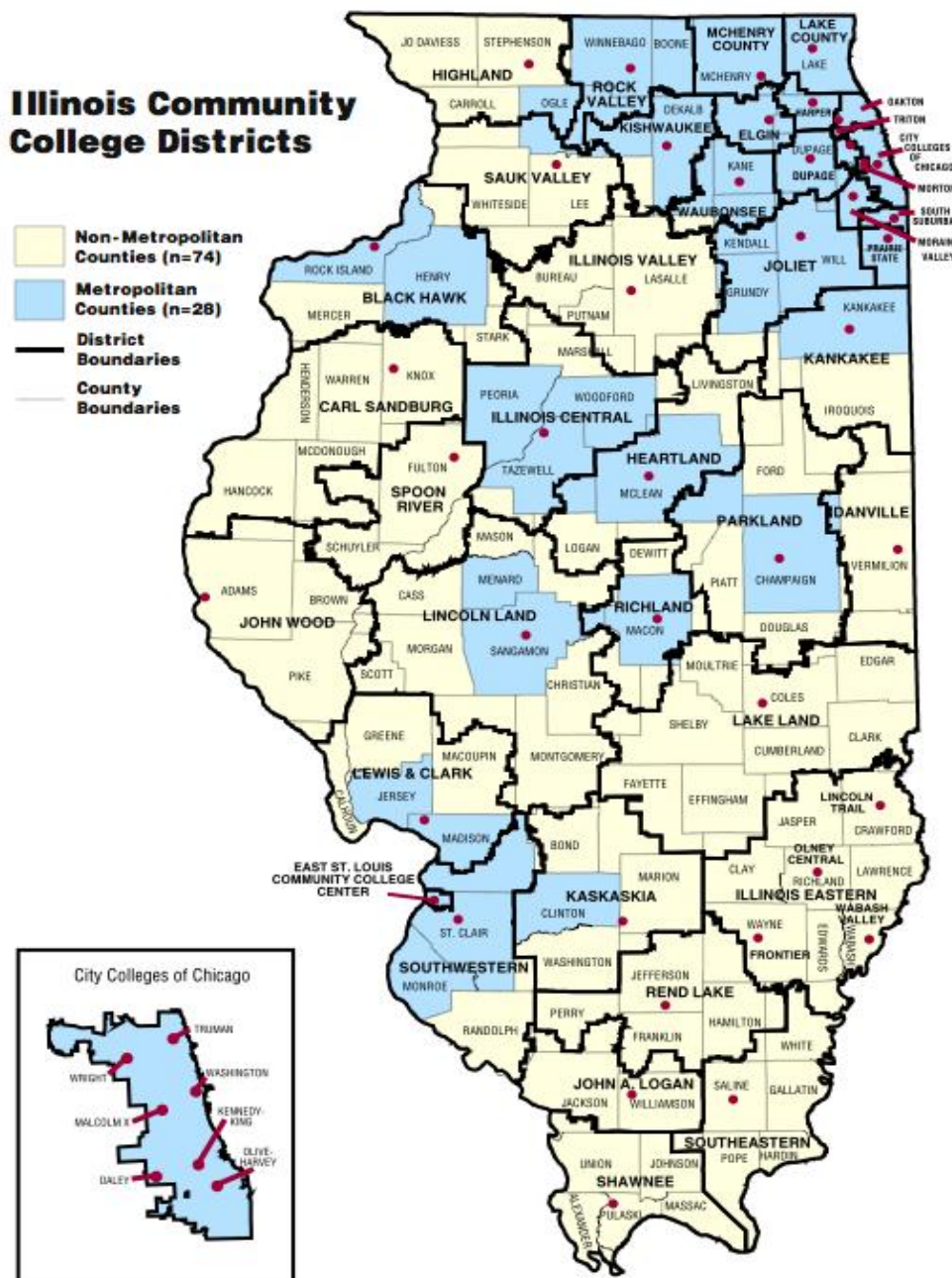
Percentage speaking a language other than English at home:

Illinois 21.5% U.S. 19.4%

Illinois has a large metropolitan area in Chicago coupled with a considerable portion of the state as defined as rural. The state is divided into 39 separate community college districts (see Figure 4) with 48 community colleges and two multi-campus

districts. It is estimated approximately one million Illinois residents are enrolled or use community college services each year (ICCB, 2008).

Figure 4. Illinois community college districts.



Note. From Illinois Community College Board, <http://www.iccb.org/pdf/district.pdf>

Each community college has an elected board of trustees with the exception of City Colleges of Chicago, whose board is appointed by the Mayor of Chicago. The boards establish the tuition rates for the college each fiscal year for three categories: in-district, out-of –district in-state, and out-of-state, which includes international students. Each college determines their tuition rates independently based on the district’s tax base, the State of Illinois formula for reimbursement for enrollment, and individual college fiscal needs. Whereas in-district tuition in Illinois ranges between \$70 to \$90 per credit hour, out-of-state tuition rates, which international students are subject to, varies widely from \$100 to \$437. Table 9 indicates the amount of out-of-state tuition international students pay per credit at all Illinois community colleges.

Table 9. Illinois Out-of-State Tuition Rates for Fiscal Year 2008

	Fall FY2008		
	Tuition	Fee	Total
BLACK HAWK	\$267.00	\$7.00	\$274.00
CHICAGO	\$309.76	\$8.33	\$318.09
DANVILLE	\$150.00	\$10.00	\$160.00
DUPAGE	\$329.25	\$20.75	\$350.00
ELGIN	\$437.22	\$-	\$437.22
HARPER	\$388.00	\$14.00	\$402.00
HEARTLAND	\$216.00	\$5.00	\$221.00
HIGHLAND	\$123.00	\$6.00	\$129.00
ILLINOIS CENTRAL	\$165.00	\$-	\$165.00
ILLINOIS EASTERN	\$226.83	\$3.00	\$229.83
ILLINOIS VALLEY	\$246.89	\$7.25	\$254.14
JOLIET	\$248.83	\$14.00	\$262.83
KANKAKEE	\$303.18	\$6.00	\$309.18
KASKASKIA	\$273.53	\$7.00	\$280.53
KISHWAUKEE	\$281.20	\$7.00	\$288.20
LAKE COUNTY	\$272.00	\$14.00	\$286.00
LAKE LAND	\$269.65	\$13.80	\$283.45
LEWIS & CLARK	\$284.00	\$9.00	\$293.00
LINCOLN LAND	\$216.00	\$10.00	\$226.00
LOGAN	\$236.06		\$236.06
MC HENRY	\$313.16	\$9.00	\$322.16
MORAIN VALLEY	\$242.00	\$5.00	\$247.00
MORTON	\$256.00	\$16.00	\$272.00
OAKTON	\$296.59	\$2.60	\$299.19
PARKLAND	\$335.00	\$3.00	\$338.00
PRAIRIE STATE	\$323.00	\$9.00	\$332.00
REND LAKE	\$150.00	\$-	\$150.00
RICHLAND	\$387.99	\$4.50	\$392.49
ROCK VALLEY	\$401.00	\$8.00	\$409.00
SANDBURG	\$135.00	\$17.00	\$152.00
SAUK VALLEY	\$275.00	\$3.00	\$278.00
SHAWNEE	\$94.20	\$6.00	\$100.20
SOUTH SUBURBAN	\$323.00	\$13.75	\$336.75
SOUTHEASTERN	\$102.00	\$2.00	\$104.00
SOUTHWESTERN	\$275.00	\$-	\$275.00
SPOON RIVER	\$171.50	\$10.50	\$182.00
TRITON	\$222.32	\$10.00	\$232.32
WAUBONSEE	\$249.00	\$3.00	\$252.00
WOOD	\$188.00	\$8.00	\$196.00

Note. Data provided with permission of the Illinois Community College Board

Rural and Suburban Illinois Community Colleges

To determine the geographic classification of the community colleges in Illinois, the Carnegie Classifications were utilized. According to the Carnegie Foundation website (2007), “from its inception, the Carnegie Classifications’ purpose has been to assist those conducting research on higher education.” The definitions of rural, suburban, and urban settings were developed by Stephen Katsinas, Vincent Lacey, and David Hardy of the University of Alabama. By their definition, a *suburban setting* is one which is physically located within U.S. Census designated Primary Metro Statistical Areas (PMSAs) or Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) with population exceeding 500,000 per the 2000 U.S. Census. Illinois counties that fall within a portion of a PMSA or MSA are shaded on the map (see Figure 4). However if the population of the MSA or PMSA in the district is less than 500,000 or it is not in any PMSA or MSA, it would be classified as a *rural setting*.

The research focus on suburban and rural community colleges is intentional. With location considered a factor in previous research on international students’ decision making process, this study sought to explore those differences. Previous studies by Zeszotarski (2003) and Doku (2007) on international students at U.S. community colleges were based on schools in urban and suburban setting. Yet, research on international students attending rural colleges in Australia and Canada shows different challenges for both the students and institutions. Research by Bronwyn Ellis, Janet Sawyer, Rod Gill, John Medlin, and Digby Wilson (2005) on international students at the rural Whyalla campus of the University of South Australia found the factors to be more based on accessibility. Subsequent research by Kathryn Edgeworth of Charles Sturt University and

John Eiseman of the University of Sydney (2007) studying international students at the rural University of Sydney Orange campus observed students to be less aware or concerned with the geographical setting. Geoffrey Cudmore's (2005) research on international student recruiting efforts of the Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology, similar to the U.S. Community Colleges, noted the disparity in the number of international students attending those colleges in the Toronto area compared to those in rural location, where the limited multiculturalism of the area may be a challenge for recruitment. At this time, no similar research on international students at rural US community colleges could be found. This study intends to begin to address this present gap in the research.

The increasing number of international students at rural community colleges has resulted in calls for research. Dennis Headrick (2003) in his dissertation on challenges confronting global education at Midwest community colleges specifically calls for future studies to "look at rural community colleges compared with a more urban community college" and interviews to be conducted with international students at community colleges (p. 113). Karen Hunter-Anderson, Vice-President of Adult Education and Institutional Support for the Illinois Community College Board, stated in a personal interview (March 12, 2008) that, "there has been a dramatic increase (in international students) in Illinois especially more rural schools." Hunter-Anderson, who has provided a community college perspective with her work for the NAFSA: Association for International Educators, sees this as a trend that is likely to continue since rural schools wanting to bring globalization to their campus look towards enrolling international

students. Rural and suburban institutions alike can increase their profile in the international student market with programs such as the *Study Illinois* consortium.

Study Illinois Consortium

The community colleges in this study were selected from the *Study Illinois* consortium. This consortium is one of a number of newly established state based international student recruiting efforts found throughout the country notably in the Midwest and Northwest portions of the country. Similar programs exist in the State of Washington, Oregon, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Indiana. Such programs are proactive state higher education initiatives to stimulate international student growth in the wake of the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001 and the subsequent tightening of international student regulations.

The *Study Illinois* Consortium consists of a partnership of Illinois-based accredited institutions of higher education with financial and technical support from the US Department of Commerce. Other local organizations such the International Trade Association of Greater Chicago and the Illinois Office of Trade and Investment have sponsored events for the organization and other in-kind donations. Member colleges and universities pay a nominal annual fee of \$200 for renewing members and \$250 for new members which provides the institutions with a home page on the consortium website, joint advertising in international student publications such as Transworld and Hobson's, and a means in which to disseminate institutional information at international recruiting events. Alice Niziolek (2007), who served as *Study Illinois* Chair 2007-2008 describes these features of *Study Illinois* as "armchair recruiting." Starting in 2003 with five

member schools, the consortium has expanded to 40 institutions of which six at the time of this study were community colleges. Moreover, their participation in *Study Illinois* is reflective of an institution which is actively engaged in international student recruitment. At a time in which public funding for community colleges has been constricted, the payment of the \$200 annual membership fees demonstrates the availability of financial resources to spur recruiting efforts. The community colleges involved in *Study Illinois* share common traits in terms of marketing and recruitment and have demonstrated a commitment to international student recruitment. The four community colleges selected for this study are initial members of *Study Illinois* indicating a consistent level of involvement.

For the purposes of this study, pseudonyms for the community colleges were used to ensure confidentiality of both the institutions and study participants. With less than 40 students at some *Study Illinois* schools, pseudonyms for the students alone would be inadequate to maintain confidentiality. Table 10 lists the community college pseudonyms in the study.

Table 10. Community Colleges (pseudonyms) in *Study Illinois*

Community Colleges	Carnegie Classification (all two-year)	# of international students
Central CC	Rural Serving Medium (7,000 students)	40-30
North Star CC	Rural Serving Large (9,000 students)	40-30
River City CC	Rural Serving Large (9,000 students)	40-30
South Woods CC	Rural Serving Medium (7,000 students)	25-15
City View CC	Suburban Serving Large (16,000 students)	220-200
Hawthorne CC	Suburban Serving Large (16,000 students)	100-90

Interestingly, no urban community colleges are members of *Study Illinois* and only two of the 12 Chicago area suburban community colleges were members at the time of the study. Therefore, the study limited the research to two schools from each geographic location in order to provide a representative sampling and be able to complete the research in the same time period within in the 2008 spring semester. The first two rural based community colleges which replied were selected to participate so that the research could be completed promptly in the timeframe set by the researcher. The first two rural

schools which responded to participate in the study represented two different Carnegie Classifications for community size, large and medium. The schools which agreed to participate in the study were Central Community College, North Star Community College, City View Community College, and Hawthorne Community College.

Development of Research Design

Focus Group

The strength of the study rested largely on ensuring that participants selected and the questions asked of them would be able to address the research questions. Therefore, a focus group of experts familiar with international students in the community college was used in order to evaluate the interview questions being asked of the participants and to provide feedback on the process for student selection and procedures in securing international student participants. Their suggestions and insights were invaluable leading to adjustments to the interview questions, decisions on the student selection, and assistance in the procedures on locating potential international student participants.

The three participants in the focus group provided a wealth of experience and expertise to the design of this study. One of the participants was a former F-1 international student, who is now faculty chair of a World Languages Department at an Illinois community college, which has large F-1 student population. Another two participants are recently retired international student advisors with Master's degrees in social work. Although they both are originally from the same Illinois community college, they entered their positions through different avenues, one coming from college advising and the other from work as an ESL faculty member. The two international student

advisors had retired within a year and half for one and two months for the other at the time of the focus group, so their knowledge of international students for the purposes of this study was still very current. As international student advisors, they updated the federal government's SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) data and served as DSOs (designated school officials) for the community college where they worked. According to William O' Connell (1994) of NAFSA: Association for International Educators in his book entitled, *Foreign Student Education at Two-Year Colleges*, designated student officials is the "legal term for a person authorized to sign immigration documents for F-1 students" (p. 54). The depth of knowledge on the rules and regulations of international students they were able to provide was of great value to the research.

Findings of Focus Group

The focus group agreed that the participant interview questions would address the research questions and no changes were made. The only revision suggested was regarding the first two demographic questions which could be more reflective of those students who have a multi-national identity.

The focus group felt the results of the study would vary if the participants included those seeking English as their primary course of study along with those seeking a degree in a particular discipline. This contribution was incorporated in the design of this study.

The focus group was also asked to consider if the length of time a participant was enrolled at a community college would be of possible significance to the study. They

agreed the study participants should not be in their first semester at the community college because they would be at a critical stage in their cultural adjustment to the institution and possibly the country or region as well. The ideal time to interview the students according to focus group would be around the middle of their second semester.

Although international students are not citizens of the United States, they are still protected by U.S. federal laws like the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Therefore, recruiting international students for participation in this study required the collaborative agreement and participation of the International Student Director at each of the *Study Illinois* community colleges where the research participants were enrolled. The focus group graciously shared their own experiences in working with researchers who wanted to interview international students. Based on their knowledge of the law, protocol, and practice, they informed the researcher that the international student director for each institution would need to be contacted directly and would serve as the gatekeepers for the international student participants. The focus group's recommendation was for the international student director to identify and make the initial contact with the international students who met the criteria for the study. The students could then respond directly to the researcher or to the international student director at their institution if they wanted to participate in the study. The researcher would follow this protocol once he had approval from each community college to conduct research on their campus.

Community College Site Selection

Between December 2007 and January 2008, community colleges who participate in the *Study Illinois* Consortium were contacted to ascertain their willingness to participate in this study. The researcher contacted the appropriate vice-president responsible for the international student office. In some cases, the researcher was referred to a dean or an office of institutional research. The researcher followed-up by sending a letter requesting approval (Appendix A) and a complete copy of the National-Louis University Institutional Research Review Board approved research proposal including consent forms for the colleges review and records. In one case, the community college had an institutional research review board that facilitated this process. In all cases, the researcher requested and received a written confirmation; approvals to conduct the research were received in January and February 2008. Once written approval was granted and received, the researcher contacted the Directors of International Students to begin the research.

Discussions with the international student office and the researcher took place between February 2008 and April 2008. Arrangements were made for the participant interviews. These interviews at the four participating community colleges took place over a five week period from March 12, 2008 to April 9, 2008.

Research Procedures

Throughout the research process, an audit trail was established to enhance transparency. Guba and Lincoln (1981) call for audit trail to trace the findings of data analysis back to the point where the data was collected. Records were kept with all

correspondences with the participants and their host institutions. The data from the correspondences was logged and filed in order to be readily accessible as needed. Field notes, both observational and reflective, were also maintained and stored with the corresponding data.

The participants were sent a confirmation letter, two consent forms, and demographic questionnaire prior to the interview (see Appendix B, C, & D). A copy of the signed consent form was given to the participant and the researcher retained the original. The original signed consent form, transcripts, audio tapes, sound files, field notes, responses to the demographic questionnaire were all kept in a locked file at the researcher's domicile.

Use of Language

Language plays a pivotal role in qualitative inquiry and is the means of obtaining the research data. As Chase (1995) addresses, "social scientists whose research depends heavily on talk (whether in survey, intensive interviews, or ethnographic work) usually ignore the fact that talk itself constitutes their data" (p. 30).

In this study, English was selected because the study participants had demonstrated through their class work and test scores that their English proficiency was at a college level. Although the use of English provides for a shared language, how the words and terms are understood could be different as a result to differences in culture, the context in which the interviews took place, and the relationship of the interviewer to the interviewee. However, the same could be said if the interviewer and interviewee were native speakers of the same language with similar backgrounds. That is to say that there

is no use of language which is not subject to interpretation, a point argued by scholars like John K. Smith (1989). In fact, the use of English in this study could provide insight which would not be present in another language. Hertz-Lazarowitz and Shapira (2005) in their study of Muslim women in Israel found the use of Hebrew instead of the participants' native language of the Palestinian dialect of Arabic to be more liberating for their participants. An awareness of these differences in language needs to be acknowledged as this helps to strengthen the common terms used in the study. This level of knowledge and training aided the researcher to address common terms in the study to develop a mutual understanding of the terms.

Limitations of the Study

Although efforts were made to obtain data in line with the rigor of the study, potential limitations for the study still existed. Triangulation of the data through member checks and audit trails were utilized to mitigate these potential limitations.

Qualitative research by its very nature relies heavily on human interpretation. Patton (1990) contends the human element to be both a strength and weakness of qualitative inquiry and analysis. The researcher is limited by their own knowledge and biases. To address such concerns, an awareness on the behalf of the researcher is paramount. An awareness of ethnic and cultural differences between the researcher and participants is acknowledged. The researcher's experience living in three of the students' home countries and being a former international student was beneficial throughout the study.

One limitation was language use. The participants of this study were non-native English speakers and although their English was at a college level, the potential for

interview questions and responses to be interpreted differently existed. J.G. Lin (2000), researcher and international student advisor, believes even with an understanding of English, students may have difficulty expressing their feeling about decision making by virtue of language and cultural differences. Additionally, the international students may not have been interviewed in English before, so the entire experience could have been new to them. To address this language limitation, extra time in the interviews was provided for those participants who needed it. Member checks were another approach used to verify the data collected. Language, even when all are native English-speakers, is a limitation in all interviewing methodologies since messages are never communicated 100%. However, English was the common language employed for consistency throughout the process.

Because the students' status in the country is tied to their student visa, there may have been a reluctance to speak candidly about their decision making process. In some countries, the procedure for receiving an international student visa for the United States is an arduous process which involves probing face-to-face interviews with U.S. Consulate Officials who must determine the fate of the student. Although all the students interviewed for this study shared a common result of receiving the U.S. visa, there may have been a reluctance to speak candidly, sharing their feelings and insights regarding that experience. Since the researcher is a white middle-aged American male, his ethnicity may have affected how information was shared.

The need to have a congenial and non-threatening atmosphere for the participant interviews was paramount. The interviewer made efforts to establish this comfortable atmosphere before the interview by reiterating the purpose of the study, taking time to

learn about the participants and starting with more causal conversation not directly related to the topic. The use of pseudonyms for the participants and their schools was intended to address this issue as well. All participants were notified their names would not be used prior to giving consent to participate and again prior to the in-person interview. Even with these precautions, the participants might have believed their identity would be revealed by their answers.

To be in full compliance with the community colleges where the participants are enrolled, the international student office through the Designated School Official (DSO), needed to grant access to the students. Although the researcher worked with the international student offices to assure participation was voluntary, the possibility of the participants perceiving the research as an obligation existed. Study participants were verbally informed by the interviewer prior to the interview they could opt out of the study at any time. This was further stated in the consent form which all the participants have a signed copy of.

CHAPTER 4

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Qualitative data collection and analysis are particularly appropriate for the study of phenomena not well understood. Qualitative data collection relies on words, spoken or printed, documents and artifacts rather than numbers as in quantitative research. The data collected from the qualitative research process allows the researcher to discover commonalities, similarities, patterns, parallels, nuances, and differences among the study participants. Further exploration of the subject matter can be pursued through an analysis of the data collected. As Miles and Huberman (1994) posit,

With qualitative data one can preserve chronological flow, see precisely which events led to which consequences, and derive fruitful explanations. Then, too, good qualitative data are more likely to lead to serendipitous findings and to new integrations: they help researchers to get beyond initial conceptions and to generate or revise conceptual frameworks. (p. 1)

Therefore, appropriate techniques were selected to capture the data. These techniques, which included interviews, demographic surveys, and field notes, allowed for triangulation of the data. In maintaining the rigor of the study, member checks were employed to lend creditability to the data collected. The process of collecting and analyzing the data is recursive and iterative; thus, an audit trail was maintained to provide transparency. The data was analyzed through the coding of emergent themes derived from the interviews and a priori themes found in the literature. With the researcher serving as the instrument in this study, reflexivity contributed to the analysis of the data

as well as the rigor of the study. This chapter elaborates how qualitative interviews were conducted and how quality, trustworthiness, and rigor were ensured.

Data Collection and Analysis Process

The primary data collection method was participant interviews. These interviews were semi-structured to allow for the purposes of reflective, open answers. The interpretive paradigm calls for semi-structured or unstructured interviewing (Willis, 2007). Interpretation is a pivotal feature of the interview, which Denzin and Lincoln (2005) note, “is not a neutral tool, for at least two people create the reality of the interview situation” (p. 643). The use of in-person interviews allow for further elucidation of the research purpose. As qualitative research authority Sharan Merriam (2002) views it, “the researcher can expand his or her understanding through nonverbal as well as verbal communication, process information (data) immediately, clarify and summarize material, check with respondents for accuracy of interpretation, and explore unusual or unanticipated responses” (p. 5). In the view of Steiner Kvale (1996), author of *Inter Views: A Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*, “the very virtue of qualitative interviews is their openness” (p.84).

In preparation for the interview, a series of stages needed to be followed. These steps move the research from its underpinning foundation through data collecting and analysis. Steiner Kvale’s (1996) six stages to the qualitative interview were consulted in developing the interview process and the subsequent analysis. The six stages according to Kvale are as follows:

1. Thematising – identifying what needs to be answered for the research and formulating questions;
2. Designing – fitting the interview into the constraints of the study and testing questions through focus group or experts;
3. Interviewing- collecting the data;
4. Transcribing-a critical step of preparing the data for analysis;
5. Analyzing – looking for themes through one of the five analysis methods based on the theoretical framework of the study;
6. Validating-assessing the reliability, validity, and generalizability of the research.

Stage 1: Thematising

While formulating the questions to ask of the participants, the driving research questions were reviewed. The questions needed to invoke responses that were purposeful for the study's driving research questions are as follows:

Stage 2: Designing

Once the interview questions were developed, a focus group of international student experts reviewed the questions to determine if they would elicit the responses needed to answer the research questions. The focus group participants were international student directors and former international students. The wording of the interview questions had to also be understandable to a group of participants with different native language backgrounds. Colloquialism and complicated terminology needed to be avoided. At the

same time, the wording needed to be conversational to facilitate a more comfortable interview process. Yin (2003) speaks to the multiple levels which the interview questions must possess when he states, “you operate on two levels at the same time: satisfying the needs of your line of inquiry while simultaneously putting forth ‘friendly’ and ‘nonthreatening’ questions in your open-ended interviews” (p. 90).

After confirming the wording of the interview questions, a pilot test of the interview was conducted with international students from the researcher’s institution. None of those included in the interview question pilot test were in the study. Yin (2003) described the role of a pilot test to, “help you to refine your data collection plans with respect to both the content of the data and the procedures to be followed” (p.79). The pilot test allowed for the researcher to test the interview questions with Illinois community college international students as well as hone his interviewing skills. Additionally, recording equipment was field tested during this pilot test to determine the optimum positioning of the equipment and how it would record in different settings.

Before participating in the study and the in-person interviews, the 13 participants signed a consent form (See Appendix C). The concept of a consent form may have been unfamiliar to international students. Therefore, the contents were verbally reviewed with each participant to ensure understanding and meaning. Additionally, efforts to simplify the language on the consent form were made. International Student Office Directors and staff aided in facilitating this process by explaining the role of the consent form to the participants prior to the interview, while the researcher addressed any specific questions the students had.

Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of both the host institutions and the student participants. The pseudonyms selected for the students reflected their ethnic identity. If the student had adopted a “western” or “anglicized” name, the pseudonym reflected this.

Demographic information (demographic survey) on the participants such as gender, nationality, language, and educational background of the participant and family were gathered as part of the interview process. This information collected from the demographic survey (See Appendix D) provided additional information pertinent to gaining an understanding of the elements which could be pulling and pushing factors for the student. The resulting data collected from the demographic survey are discussed further in Chapter Five.

Stage 3: Interviewing

Consistency was at the forefront during the interview process. A protocol encompassing the setting, time, language, questions, interviewer, and research tools was utilized to enhance consistency providing credibility and trustworthiness to the findings.

All interviews were conducted on the Illinois community college campus which the international students attended in settings which were familiar to the student. Each setting was well-lit and free of ambient noise. The interviewer and interviewee sat across from each other at a table with recording devices on either side of the interviewee.

Interviews were conducted during the school day at times in which the students were not in class. One hour was given for each interview. Although the student participants were informed that the time of the interview could exceed one hour, none of

the participants went over the time period. The time allotted for the interview was adequate for the interviewer to ask all the interview questions and probe further as needed.

The interviews had consistency in the core questions asked, but there was no rigid structure by which the questions were given. Rather the interviewer made use of an interview guide (Appendix E). This was felt to be most useful to lend a more uninhibited approach, yet cover the same areas and give focus to the interview. Merriam and Simpson (1995) recommend measures like the interview guide for the purposes of comparing data. The set group of questions was used by the interviewer and provided to the participant at the start of the interview. As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) note, “Even when an interview guide is employed, qualitative interviews offer the interviewer considerable latitude to pursue a range of topics and offer the subject a chance to shape the content of the interview” (p. 104). This has the advantage of framing the relationship between the researcher and participant in a way which is less of a question-response format and more interactive between both parties.

The researcher served as the interviewer for all the interviews conducted in this study. This measure reduced any situational bias and interviewer intrusion influencing the data collected. As noted by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the researcher is an instrument of measurement in qualitative research. Thus, by having one researcher conduct the interviews, the process maintains congruency.

The language of English was used for all the interviews. English was selected because it is the common language of all the participants in the study. The students had

all met the selection criteria, one of which required them to be proficient in English at college level.

Participants were informed again prior to the interview of the audio recording of proceedings. All the participants felt comfortable with the use of the recording devices. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) warn of the perils of using recording equipment and recommend that researcher be prepared for malfunctions. For that reason, the researcher used two different recorders: a digital recorder with 4 hours of high quality memory storage which served as the primary recording source and an audio cassette recorder with an auto reverse feature to allow for 90 minutes of uninterrupted recording for the back-up. The recording of the interviews is a preferable method according to Merriam and Simpson (1995). One of the reasons cited is how recordings reduce the loss of data, which aids in strengthening the validity of the interviews. Another reason is the transcripts of the interview audio recordings will be used in the triangulation of the data during data analysis.

Field notes utilized before, during, and after the interviews are both observational and reflective. Field notes provide a detailed description of the participants, the surroundings, and the thoughts and feelings of the researcher. Lincoln and Guba (1985), leading researchers in the area of naturalistic inquiry, advocate for the use of field notes as a measure to increase trustworthiness of narrative data. Bogdan and Bilken (2007) confer, "In conducting taped interviews, for example, the meaning and context of the interview can be captured more completely if, as a supplement to each interview, the researcher writes out field notes" (p. 119). Observational field notes produce rich details

which lend to the transferability of the findings. Reflective field notes can contribute to audit trail for the study's findings and provide another avenue for transparency.

Stage 4: Transcribing

The recorded data was sent to a professional for data transcription. The data transcriptionist signed a confidentiality agreement (See Appendix F). These transcripts were further reviewed by the researcher for accuracy based on the recorded interviews. With the help of field notes, the researcher as the interviewer was able to clarify words or terms which the transcriptionist could not ascertain from the audio recording only. In some cases, the interviewer's background as an English as a Second Language instructor enhanced his ability to identify words from the accented English of the participants with nine different first languages. After the transcript was reviewed by the researcher, it was sent to the participants by email for further review as part of the member check prior to the data analysis (Appendix G). Lincoln and Guba (1985) advocate the use of member checks as part of the rigor of the research. All the participants were given copies of their transcribed interview to verify the information with the researcher. The participants all confirmed that no modifications needed to be made to their respective transcribed interview.

Stage 5: Analyzing

The term data analysis as it is used here comes from Bogdan and Biklen's (2007) definition as "working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns" (p. 159). In discussing the

data analysis conducted in this study, it is pivotal to provide transparency throughout the process. According to Linda Finlay (2007), “being clear and explicit about criteria adds to the transparency of the research, enabling readers to better understand the researchers’ values and interests” (p. 6). Furthermore, transparency allows for confirmability of the research. The construction of this study can be replicated by clearly describing, detailing, and delineating the processes and procedures thus providing for as much transparency as possible.

Data Analysis can be divided into three distinct parts. The initial step involves preparing the data. In this step, possible a priori themes are selected from the literature and the data is formatted for review. The next step is an inductive one and involves being open to all possibilities reflected and not reflected in the data. In some cases, aspects not present in the data can be equally valuable to those aspects present in the data. Initial coding and themes emerge from the transcribed data and field notes from this step. In the third step, the data is interpreted. At this point, codes are clustered into small units or placed into patterns. From here, salient themes are identified and conclusions can be drawn.

Initial Phase

A key component throughout the data analysis process in qualitative research is its recursive nature. Data is actually being analyzed as it is being collected. Since the researcher is the tool or instrument utilized for data collection and analysis in qualitative research, reflection is unavoidable. Bodgan and Bilken (2007) advocate for techniques like mamboing and field notes to begin engaging the researcher in thinking about data

analysis while data collecting. Reflective field notes, for example, offer an audit trail to follow the evolution of data collection and analysis. This continuous recursive and iterative engagement serves as a process of verification of the data, which lends credibility to the findings. Data collection and analysis are intrinsically linked and overlap throughout the research process.

Intermediate Phase

In preparing for coding of the data, the recommendations of Bogdan and Biklen (2007) were followed. They advocate developing codes by looking for recurring themes and terms in reviewing the data along with a preliminary list of possible codes from a priori themes. A review of the literature provided some a priori themes for consideration. A priori themes identified from related research on international students included: (a) seeking a global identity; (b) ease of entry into the college; (c) affordable cost; (d) preferred location; and (e) personal recommendation. Table 11 shows the a priori themes from the literature review on factors influencing international students' decisions to study abroad.

Table 11. A Priori Themes from a Review of Literature on International Students

A priori theme	Source
Seeking a global identity	World Culture Theory Maiworm & Teichler, 1995; Rizvi, 2000; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Zeszotarski, 2003; Obst & Foster, 2006
Ease of entry into the college	Pull factor McMahon, 1992; Doku, 2007
Affordable cost	Pull factor Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Zeszotarski, 2003; Doku, 2007
Preferred location	Pull factor Leong & Sedlacek, 1989; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Zeszotarski, 2003; Doku, 2007
Personal recommendation	Pull factor Mazzarol, Soutar, & Thein, 2000; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Pimpa, 2002; Chen & Zimitat, 2006; Gray, 2007; Doku, 2007

In this second step of the data analysis process, the interview transcriptions, field notes, and reflections are reviewed for coding. Codes as described by Miles and Huberman (1994), “are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to descriptive or inferential information compiled during the study” (p. 56). To avoid a priori influences inhibiting inductive data to emerge, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) advocate that the research

should “always have built-in flexibility to allow for discoveries of new and unexpected empirical materials and growing sophistication” (p. 368). This was done by reviewing the interviews first without using the a priori themes. A subsequent review then considered a priori themes and reviewed the initial codes which emerged from the earlier review.

As the initial codes were developed, the coding categories were continually reviewed and compared with the data collected. Based on the process of reexamining codes described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the researcher looked for gaps that were not addressed in the initial codes, connections among the codes, and possible sub-codes. These sub-codes allow for further analysis by breaking down major codes into small units as noted by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

To further the researcher’s understanding of the relationships within the data, the technique of mamboing was employed. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), mamboing helps the analyst move easily from empirical data to a conceptual level, refining and expanding codes further, developing key categories and showing relationships, and building toward a more integrated understanding of events, processes, and interactions in the case. (p. 74)

As codes were developed, the researcher would make notations in a type of mamboing described by Strauss and Corbin (1990) as “code notes” (p. 73-74). This technique enabled the researcher to recognize the thought process in how the code was conceptualized and contributed to the study’s audit trail.

Final phase

As the data analysis advanced on toward interpretation, codes were then organized into smaller sets clustered by a particular theme or concept. Miles and Huberman (1994) described this technique as pattern coding that “pull together a lot of material into more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis” (p. 60). The utilization of pattern coding aided the research in two ways. First, pattern coding enabled the researcher to observe interrelated themes and relationships from the data. Secondly, the technique of pattern coding allowed for researcher to identify traits which were unique to the setting or participant. Memos from the code notes were pivotal in the development of the pattern codes.

With the patterns identified, the researcher began to map out the decision making process of the study participants. The process began by creating a series of concentric circles, each one representing a different influencing factor on the student’s decision making process. Derived from Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) conditional matrix, these models assisted in illustrating the variations of factors which confronted the international students in their decision making process. Connecting the matrix to the patterns, a rather linear decision making process model emerged. The pattern clusters coordinated with certain timeframes in the international students’ decision making process conveyed on the conditional matrix. For example, if a particular pattern code was more prevalent at one point in the international students’ decision making process timeframe and absent in subsequent points, this could illustrate how certain conditions had to be met before the student was able to advance in the process.

Stage 6: Validating- Rigor of the Study

Qualitative research relies on different criteria to evaluate research than positivist quantitative research. Miles and Huberman (1994) posit there are no shared conventions in qualitative research as found in quantitative research. However, rigor in qualitative research is actively pursued and maintained in the study. In designing this study, the researcher implemented the measures presented by Lincoln and Guba (1985) in their seminal work, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, written as a response to the positivist criteria of validity, reliability, and objectivity. Table 12 illustrates the methods employed to ensure the quality and rigor of the study. These methods for ensuring quality and rigor of the study were applied and maintained throughout the research process.

Table 12. Methods Used to Ensure Quality and Rigor in Naturalistic Inquiry

Naturalistic Inquiry Term	Methods to Ensure Quality and Rigor
Credibility	Peer examination (Focus group), Member checks, Field notes, Triangulation of data and methods, Transparency, and Authority of the Researcher (researcher as the tool)
Transferability	Detailed description of participants and setting, Transparency
Dependability	Audio taping, Member checks, Triangulation of data, Audit Trail
Confirmability	Audit Trail, Triangulation of data and Authority of the Researcher (researcher as the tool)

(Adapted from Lincoln and Guba, 1985)

Credibility

In qualitative research, multiple realities and the richness of data generated through the research need to be conveyed adequately. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to testing the richness of data collected as credibility. To accomplish credibility in the study, the researcher used transcribed interviews with the participants, field notes, and researcher's reflections to capture the different realities in many forms. These varied inputs help to produce credibility through what Yin (1994) describes as, "converging lines of inquiry" (p. 34).

In the preliminary stages of the research, focus group of experts was employed to ascertain if the interview questions being asked would invoke responses matching with the aims of the study. The members of the focus group with extensive experience with international students at Illinois community colleges constituted a peer examination of the research. Merriam and Simpson (1995) describe peer examination as enlisting colleagues to examine the measures employed and their credibility in the study's pursuits. In this case, the focus group found the interview questions to be suitable for the study's intentions. The researcher's own authority in designing the interview questions based on his experiences and the objectives of the study contributed to the process. The results of the focus group lent creditability to the study's design.

Triangulation contributed to the creditability of the study's methods and data. Stake (1995) sees the aims of triangulation as utilizing various methods and data sources to avoid misinterpretation. In this study, the different forms of data being collected, the interview transcriptions, the field notes and researcher reflections, were used for data source triangulation by the researcher. Furthermore, the varied methods employed to collect the data through interviews and observation provides what Merriam (1988) identifies as "methodological triangulation" (p. 69).

The data collected from the interviews were transcribed and sent back to the participants to validate the content. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this practice as "member-check" (p. 313). Merriam and Simpson (1995) characterize member checks as, "taking data collected from study participants and your tentative interpretations of these data back to the people from whom they were derived, asking if the data 'ring true'" (p.

102). Participants were asked to review the transcripts and respond with any changes. The participants did not request any modifications to the transcriptions.

A member check was also conducted with the representatives of the participating colleges to review the data presentation on their institution. One of the four schools requested a change in the wording of the international student director's job description. Consensus on the content of the data through member checks offered credibility to the data analyzed for this study.

Transferability

Generalizability of the research cannot be applied to qualitative research according to Lincoln and Guba (1985). Instead, they point to transferability as a test of research quality. Transferability is the responsibility of the reader and is achieved by transparency of the research process and what Merriam (1988) describes as "rich, thick descriptions" of participants and settings (p.177).

In this study, details are provided so that the readers can draw their own understandings for how this data could be transferred (transferability) and utilized in their own community college or educational institution. As Yin (1994) notes, theoretical implications can be generalized from qualitative case studies. Transparency and detailed descriptions of the process and procedures allow the reader to adapt the findings and ideas for future research.

Dependability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) see dependability as a test for rigor in qualitative research. They argue for the study's findings to be consistent with the data collected to demonstrate dependability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). For this study, dependability was exemplified by multiple ways including triangulation of the data, member checks, audio taping, and use of an audit trail.

The use of audio tape provided a tool to capture the oral portion of the interview which assisted with the interview transcription. The researcher was then able to listen to the audio tapes while reviewing the transcription making modifications as needed. On occasion, words which were unclear to the transcriptionist were identifiable to the researcher/interviewer. After this preliminary review, the transcriptions were then sent to the participants for a member check.

An audit trail was used to document all of the steps of the research process. The audit trail allows for others to draw similar conclusions if applying the same techniques and using the same research process. The audit trail provides an openness of the research, thus available to critical scrutiny. Willis (2007) likens the audit trail to the accounting practice from which the term was derived. A record was kept that includes detail of the research process, reasons for decisions made, memoing regarding on the study, particularly data collection and analysis.

Confirmability

Confirmability is achieved by the researcher striving to remain neutral in presenting the data and open to critique of the work. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recognize

bias is unavoidable, and they point out that all data is value-bound. Patton (1990) encourages the qualitative researcher to maintain “empathic neutrality” in which the researcher is empathic to the “people one encounters, while neutrality is a stance toward the findings” (p. 58). For the purposes of this study, an audit trail, data source triangulation, and the authority of the researcher were used to demonstrate confirmability. The audit trail renders insight into the decision making process of the researcher to observe how explanations were derived. The use of triangulation of the data allows for the data to be scrutinized from a variety of sources to guard against the influence of bias. Through the audit trail and triangulation, the conclusions drawn from the data should be dependent on the subject and conditions of inquiry rather than the researcher. Furthermore, the researcher as a tool in the research must be considered. As Stake (1995) posits, “qualitative case study is highly personal research” (p. 135). The researcher needs to be cognitive of the role he partakes in the research process and how this role can color the research findings.

Role of the Researcher

Researcher as the Tool

Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe the researcher as the tool in naturalistic inquiry, a unique trait of qualitative research. The researcher is involved at all steps in the research process from the design of the study, collection of the data, analysis of the data, and interpretation of the findings. Critical self-exploration is necessary for the researcher through the entire research process, yet the human qualities of the researcher can contribute bias the research. To address the influence of bias, expertise, and knowledge,

the researcher uses reflexivity of himself, when collecting and analyzing the data as well as interpretation of the findings. The nature of the “researcher as the tool” in qualitative case studies allows for greater depth in interpreting the subtle nuances from the multiple data sources.

Reflexivity is an essential part of research process and is centered on the researcher. To begin with, the researcher must recognize the role he plays in the research process and his own biases. Stake (2000) urges researcher to be reflective throughout the process. As Stake (2000) notes, “the brain work ostensibly is observational, but, more basically, it is reflective” (p. 445). The active inclusion of reflexivity of this study is another means of verification. Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe this utility of the deeper reflective process as the “theoretical sensitivity of the researcher.” The researcher possesses awareness of the subject matter and contributing forces that factor in analyzing the data. An understanding of how findings are developed through the reflective process aids with the trustworthiness of the research.

Recognition of the researcher’s role in the process assists with the transparency of the research. It is acknowledged the researcher will rely on prior experiences and his expert knowledge throughout the research process. Yin (2003) encourages the researcher to explore their prior experience in an effort to produce the highest level of analysis.

A strength of qualitative inquiry is the use of the researcher as a tool and his ability to “mine” the data and interpret the findings. Merriam and Simpson (1995) speak of the adaptability of the researcher can be in qualitative interviews in drawing out information which would not be revealed in another technique. The researcher can accomplish this through establishing a rapport with the interview participant and probing

with follow up questions. By creating a comfortable atmosphere in the interview, participants are less likely to monitor or censure their responses, which could result in greater depth of data shared. This is vital with the study's international student participants. Bodgan and Bilken (2007) encourage researchers to not ignore their feelings, but to use their feelings in being empathic to the participants. An awareness of feelings could allow the researcher to more readily recognize subtly in meaning. Bodgan and Bilken (2007) also consider feelings to be instrumental in the reflective process of reviewing the data leading to "research hunches."

The human element of qualitative research is evident. As Elliot Eisner (1997) describes in qualitative research, "we display our signatures" (p. 36). Therefore, it is imperative that the researcher's own background as it relates to the research must clearly be made known.

Researcher's Background

My interest in international students at the community college stems from my work in the ESL Department of a suburban Illinois community college and my own experience as an international student. I do employ international students as student assistants and my department maintains a close relationship to the International Student Office, which shares the same office space. The community college in which I have been employed at the time of this research is not a member of *Study Illinois*.

I have been involved with international students at many levels in my academic and professional careers. I have taught English in Japan and China and was an international graduate student in Sweden. During the course of my living abroad I met

several fellow international students from around the world, many of whom I still remain in contact with. My experiences of living and studying abroad are fond ones although I can relate to feelings of culture shock and reverse culture shock, the latter occurring when one returns to the home country. I have also worked as an international student travel agent serving both international students in the U.S. and American students choosing to go abroad. For the past five years, my family has hosted a J-1 cultural exchange student, who has a short-term working assignment that needs to include 6 credit hours at an institution of higher education. For my guest student, those credits are taken at a community college, so I am often interested in their understanding and perception of the community college.

As a U.S. citizen since birth, my perspective is that of an “American”. However, I embrace an international identity as defined in world culture theory. Furthermore, my experiences of living in three variously different countries and traveling abroad to over 25 countries have made me more aware of my personal qualities and bias especially those that may be seen as “American.”

CHAPTER 5

DATA PRESENTATION

The community colleges selected for this study all share a common involvement as initial members of the *Study Illinois* consortium. They differ, however, in terms of their geographic location in the state, enrollment size, and particular features unique to their college program. These participating community colleges provide a snapshot of international student recruiting and marketing efforts of suburban and rural community colleges.

In this section, a summary of each participating community college is provided describing its location, enrollment, and tuition. This is followed by details on the recruiting and marketing of the institutions from interviews with the international student directors, the program's website, and materials given to prospective international students. Further discussion on the four schools' approaches to recruitment and their role in the research process is presented.

In the second part of this section, an overview of the students interviewed at each school is provided showing gender, nationality, the total number of semesters they have completed prior to the interview, and the area of study at the time of the interview. Responses to the interview questions from each participant are given. Data is presented in the order it was received chronologically beginning with the first interview conducted for this study on March 12, 2008 to the final interview on April 9, 2008. This section concludes with a discussion comparing the demographic information collected from the participants.

Data Presentation of Participating Community Colleges

Central Community College

Location: Rural setting. Central part of the state, approximately 150 miles south of Chicago

Student enrollment: 7,453

International student enrollment: 40

Tuition: \$6,000 (12 hrs per semester for 2 semesters)

Central Community College international student operations are conducted by the Director of International Studies Program, who has been there for five years. The director handles all international inquiries at Central and takes between three to four recruiting trips per year to attract students. Some trips are part of a recruiting tour and some are organized by the director herself. Central also uses advertising in publications for potential international students as another means to draw attention to Central. The college works with educational agencies in select countries like South Korea, where the director will periodically go and do presentations. In the director's opinion, "it is important that they see a face. They can feel more connected."

Although Central does receive students from a nearby public 4 year institution and some students transferring in from area high schools, the director estimates the majority come from active recruiting and through the educational agencies. In the Spring 2008, 15 out of 20 new students had been in contact with the director before applying.

The Director of International Studies Programs not only recruits but also provides students support services, which includes finding housing for the international students.

North Star Community College

Location: Rural Setting. Northern part of the state, approximately 85 miles west of Chicago

Student enrollment: 15,419

International Student enrollment: 34

Tuition: \$10, 200 (12 hrs per semester for 2 semesters)

\$2,296* live-in guest rate (12 hrs per semester for 2 semesters)

* includes \$1,000 in service fees (\$500 per semester)

North Star Community College, like Central Community College, is run by one person, the International Specialist, who handles recruitment and student support services. According to the International Specialist, most of the recruiting is done locally with area high schools or through alumni or area residents.

Prospective students receive a packet of information, which includes a standard North Star Community College application, a welcome letter, information on F-1 visa requirements, sample placement test questions, 6 sided pamphlet on the international student program, and information on the live-in guest program. If a student lives as a guest in the home of someone who is a US citizen, Illinois and North Star Community College District resident, the student can receive a reduced tuition rate comparable to an in-district resident. There is a \$500 service fee which is required each semester including the summer. This tuition arrangement is unique to the other schools profiled in this study. The measure was supported by the college president and received approval from the board of trustees. The tuition rate without the live-in guest arrangement is one of the

highest in the State of Illinois. North Star, though, does not arrange student housing. In fact, the welcome letter specifically states in bold “housing and transportation is the responsibility of the student; We do not have on-campus housing.” Yet, all of the international students at the time of the interviews utilize the live-in guest rate according to the International Specialist.

The pamphlet and college website provides step-by-step application instructions, student testimonials, and information and pictures about the multicultural student club.

City View Community College

Location: Suburban setting. Northeast part of the state, approximately 12 miles south west of Chicago

Student enrollment: 17,000

International student enrollment: 210

Tuition: \$5,928 (12 hrs per semester for 2 semesters)

City View has the largest international student operations among community colleges profiled for this study with five staff members. The Director of International Student Affairs helped to create the *Study Illinois* consortium and has kept City View actively involved in professional organizations like NAFSA: Association of International Educators and the international arm of the Association of American Community College (AACC). *Study Illinois* is one of variety of channels used by City View for recruitment of students. According to the Director of International Student Affairs, these other strategies in her 15 years at City View include online and print advertising, overseas visits with organizations like Education USA Fairs, oversea agency visits, an informal alumni

network, and prompt and effective handling of all inquiries. In addition to participating in *Study Illinois* consortium, City View also helped to create a consortium of five community colleges throughout the US which offer the same services such as airport pick-up, international student orientation programs, and housing services.

When students request information, they receive a letter about the program highlighting the aforementioned services, full-time advising and counseling, free tutoring, and information on the three areas of study: university transfer, career programs, and their intensive English language program. A full color six sided brochure highlights its location to Chicago, the attractiveness of the campus, the campus facilities, student services, the three different areas of study, and the advantages of the community college. The community college is described in the brochure as “the best financial value in the American education system. Over 50 percent of U.S. students choose to attend community colleges.” The brochure goes on to highlight the lower cost of tuition, small class size, faculty dedicated to student success, tutoring center, and academic and support services. The eight page color application which is included is specific for international students. It includes housing information, a housing application and asks questions such as “What are your reasons for selecting City View?” and “How did you first learn about City View?”

City View was the only school profiled which had a housing specialist, who helped students find an apartment or a host family stay. The five-member staff coordinates a number of services for the international students. The Director of International Student Affairs estimates about 25-30% of the students have relatives in the local area.

Hawthorne Community College

Location: Suburban setting. Northeast part of the state, approximately 35 miles north of Chicago

Student enrollment: 15,866

International student enrollment: 96

Tuition: \$6,300 (12 hrs per semester for 2 semesters)

Hawthorne Community College brought in a new staff in 2006. The International Admissions Specialist came over from a neighboring suburban community college. She was later joined by an International Student Recruitment Coordinator, a new position for Hawthorne. This coordinator just started in April 2007, so none of the participants in this study had been recruited through this coordinator. As a result, they are developing new recruiting strategies. The first step was creating a marketing brochure and updating the college website. The marketing brochure is six-sided full color and promotes the cost of tuition, Hawthorne County's location, the campus facilities, and student services, and Chicago. Four professors are also profiled in the brochure in the fields of ESL, business, early childhood education, and sociology. The business professor profiled is a native of India, while the sociology professor is originally from China. Hawthorne's brochure makes note of its University Center and the "2+2" university transfer option. Students could complete a 4 year degree on Hawthorne's campus since 18 different universities offer bachelor degree completion in selected majors at the University Center.

The website has a link which lists the benefits of a community college. It is described as "the best financial value in the American education system, because tuition

is less than half of what it costs at a public university.” It mentions how 50% of US undergraduates attend a community college and how 39% of international undergraduates go to community colleges. A top ten benefits of a community college is provided along with a link to the AACC’s CommunityCollegeUSA.com website.

The Admission Specialists posits only 3 out of 100 students come from educational agents. In most cases they work directly with the families and the students.

Discussion of Data on Participating Community Colleges

Recruitment Overseas

The four community colleges participating in this study have been involved with *Study Illinois* since its inception. The degree of their involvement in the *Study Illinois* program, their use of educational agents, and overseas recruiting varies as illustrated in Table 13.

Table 13. Types of Recruiting Conducted by Participating Community Colleges

School	Overseas recruiting	Use of private educational agents	Involvement with Study Illinois trips
Central	Yes	Yes	Yes
North Star	No	No	No
City View	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hawthorne	Yes (recently)	No	No

Two of the schools, Central and Hawthorne, have had new directors take over international students operation in the last five years. In the case of Hawthorne, this led

to the creation of a new position of an international student recruiter to conduct overseas recruitment. Because their entry into this arena had been less than one year at the time of the study, the effects of this recruiting approach could not be observed in this study. In the case of City View and Central, however, international student recruiting has involved a variety of channels from overseas educational agencies and their own visits abroad. City View and Central had established relationships with educational agencies from their recruitment efforts abroad and are able to maintain them through with periodic visits such as Central's relationship to an agency in South Korea. Both City View and Central were involved with the early development of *Study Illinois* and had been the only community colleges at the time of the study to travel abroad in promoting *Study Illinois*. In this sense, City View and Central share more similarities with each other when it comes to recruiting than they do with their suburban and rural counterpart respectively. It can be suggested from this data that international student recruiting strategies are not derived from a specific geographical location.

Unique Features

The community colleges participating in this study have had to differentiate themselves from other forms of higher education as well as other community colleges. The following unique features of the participating community colleges could factor into the international students' decision to attend this institution.

- Central – Its unique location to three major U.S. cities while being in a “safe rural environment”

- North Star - Living-In Guest Tuition rate similar to in-district with an added \$500 fee per semester
- City View – Housing Program with host family stays
- Hawthorne- A University Center for 2+2 Bachelor's degree completion

The participating schools used these unique attributes along with information on U.S. community colleges to position themselves as an inexpensive quality educational option to students.

Involvement of Community Colleges

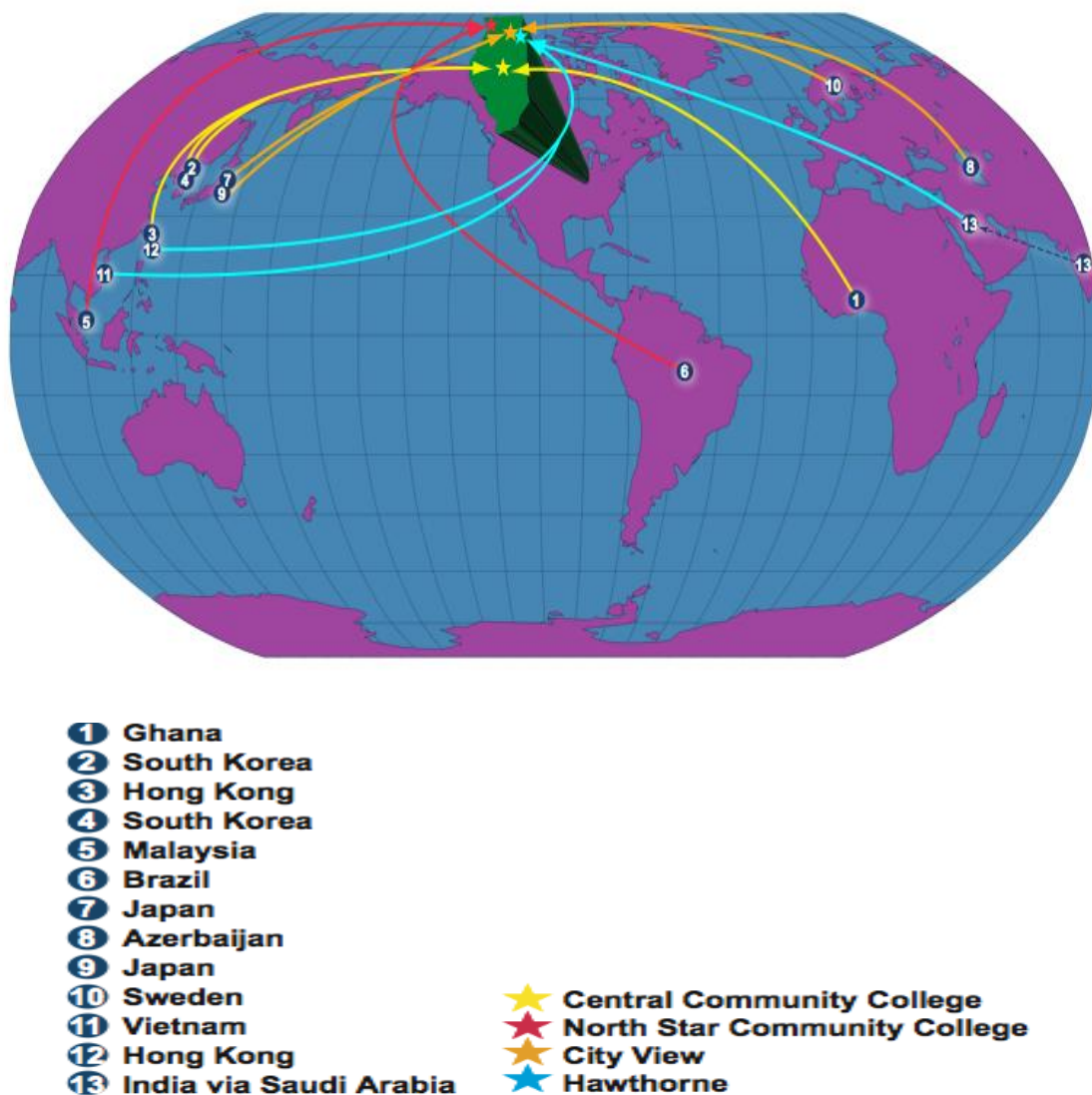
In order to arrange for this study, consent from the administration and cooperation from the international student staff and internal offices of research was needed. All four of the participating schools were amiable to having the study conducted on their campus and were interested in the goals of the study. The International Student Directors at Central, North Star, City View, and Hawthorne were pivotal liaisons between the researcher and the study participants. The directors introduced the study to their international student population and provided a quiet area in which the interviews could be conducted. Without the involvement of the international student directors, this research study could not have been conducted.

Data Presentation of the Participants

The thirteen students who offered to participate in this study reflect the diversity of international students at community colleges. Although not intended, the study participants were almost evenly distributed by gender with seven male participants and

six female participants. The nationalities of the participants were diverse with ten different nationalities represented out of thirteen participants (See Figure 5).

Figure 5. Countries of origin of the participants.



Note: colors used in this and subsequent tables identify the community colleges participating the study (Table 14).

Table 14. Color Codes Used in the Study

Yellow	Central Community College
Rose	North Star Community College
Gold	City View Community College
Blue	Hawthorne Community College

The participants' areas of study were equally diverse with the students pursuing ten different disciplines among them. (See Table 15)

Table 15. Demographics of the Participants

Name	Gender	Area of study
1.Mary	Female	Nursing
2.Seung	Male	Engineering
3.Wu	Male	Engineering
4.Gloria	Female	Marketing
5.Susan	Female	Math
6.Humberto	Male	International Business
7.Yutaka	Male	Business
8.Sadiq	Male	Computers
9.Sachiko	Female	Graphic Design
10.Johan	Male	General Education
11.Karen	Female	Communications
12.Faye	Female	Undecided
13.Ajay	Male	Engineering

Central Community College

Date of Interviews: March 12, 2008

Based on order of interview

Table 16. Central Community College Participants

Participant	Gender	Nationality	Total Semesters Completed	Area of Study
Mary	Female	Ghana	Two	Nursing
Seung	Male	South Korea	Three	Engineering
Wu	Male	Hong Kong	One	Engineering
Gloria	Female	South Korea	Two	Marketing

Mary

Prior to attending a community college

Mary first arrived in the U.S. in 2003 from Accra, Ghana to accompany her husband, an international graduate school student. She had never studied at the college level until she came to Central.

When did you first start planning to study internationally?

Mary did not start thinking about studying internationally until she got married and her husband was going to study in the U.S. She had been preparing to go to university in her native Ghana. “I didn’t know until he said he was going to bring me to the United States.”

Why did you decide on coming to the U.S.A to study?

Mary's decision to come to the U.S. was based on her responsibilities to her husband. "When I found that I was about to get married and move to the United States, I wouldn't have the opportunities to be a wife and mother if I stayed in my home country." Furthermore, Mary views the U.S. educational system favorably. "I always felt American education system is the best to me."

How did you first learn about American community colleges and what did you like about them?

Mary's first exposure to American community colleges came when they arrived in Chicago and they moved into an apartment in the suburbs less than a mile from a community college. "I tried to apply to (suburban college) because it was close and thought it would be cheaper than university." She did not consider any other schools at that time.

She was in the process of changing her immigration status from F-2, accompanying spouse of an international student, to F-1 international student when her husband transferred to a public university in the middle of the state for his second Master's. "I didn't think about college when we moved to this place. I did before but when we moved, things changed." Mary would have a daughter after moving to the central part of the state and so her studies were placed on hold.

How did you first learn about your school and why did you decide on attending your school?

Mary's husband would learn about Central from a fellow African international student from Zambia who was studying at the same public university. According to Mary, her husband was considering the public university for her, but the tuition at Central led them to further investigation. "He said it was cheap, and so we just try to see whether it was true. So when we came here, it was affordable and closer to where we lived."

The first aspect which Mary cited when asked what she liked about Central was the environment followed by tuition, its close proximity, and the type of program she wanted. The two year aspect was identified as a strength of Central when compared with a four-year university in that she could be a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) first and then continue on to be a Registered Nurse (RN). "I would have to go to (public university) for four years, but this place I could use two year to complete whatever I wanted. (Public university) is a four year nursing program. This way I could go through LPN for two years before I go to RN."

Future goals

At the time of the interview, Mary was waiting to hear if she had been accepted into the LPN program. She intends to finish this program at Central and then move to be with her husband, who has since taken a position in Chicago. Five years from now Mary would like be an RN.

Seung

Prior to attending a community college

Seung graduated from high school in Canada and then came to the U.S. for the first time to begin his studies at Central. He is from South Korea's second largest city, Pusan

When did you first start planning to study internationally?

Seung started planning when he was in 10th grade. Originally he was considering a university student exchange program with his native South Korea and Japan, but his parents wanted him to study English and began to investigate studying in the U.S. When asked about his parents' involvement, Seung stated, "they were planning on this a long time ago."

In his home country, he did not see opportunities for his career path of engineering. "About 70% of graduated students with an engineering major, they don't have a job about their major. They just work as a business man even though engineering was their major." He described how one of his mother's friends had a son who graduated from the 2nd best university in South Korea in engineering and now works as a road cleaner for a subway station.

Seung did not consider any South Korean schools for his post-secondary education. "I actually don't like the education system in South Korea. I don't like it all." In his perspective, the teachers "don't really want to teach students. They just want to get paid and keep their jobs."

Seung encountered what he described as “some problems in high school in Korea and had to go to another high school.” Instead of staying in South Korea, he looked abroad to finish high school through the help of an agency. However, because his school year ends in South Korea in December, the agency was unable to find a U.S. high school which would take him mid-year. “That is why I picked Canada because they speak English and accept any students between their school years.”

Why did you decide on coming to the U.S.A to study?

From his research, Seung determined the U.S. would be the best place to go for his study of engineering. He looked at an article told him 80% of Koreans who graduate with an engineering major abroad do not come back to South Korea to work but receive lucrative jobs abroad. His research showed him most of the highest ranking universities in engineering were in the U.S. “If I graduate here, it will be easier to get a job.”

Although he had completed his studies in Canada, he did not consider Canadian colleges. Seung did not view the Canadian university system as equal to the U.S. “In a job interview if you say ‘I graduated from Canada,’ how do I say, (pause) it is better to graduate from a university in America.”

How did you first learn about American community colleges and what did you like about them?

Seung’s parents first learned about community colleges at a presentation given by the Central Community College’s International Student Director. This presentation was done through an agency which Central has an agreement with in South Korea.

Despite a community college system in Canada, Seung had not heard of this option until his parents returned from the presentation and asked if he wanted to go to college in the U.S. He had not taken two of the most often required placement tests for U.S. colleges - the SAT or the TOEFL, which prevented him from applying to U.S. universities.

If (Central's International Student Director) didn't come to Korea, I don't know what I would be doing right now. I have told my friends not to take the SATs. Just go to a community college and then transfer to where ever you wanted. It's an easier way.

Two other positive aspects which Seung said they learned from the presentation on Central Community College were the smaller class sizes and price of tuition.

How did you first learn about your school and why did you decide on attending your school?

Seung and his parents worked through the agency to facilitate the process of studying at Central. "They prepare everything for me. Visa interviews, I-20, airplane tickets, find my guardian and host family if I'm in high school. Almost everything I need." This recruiter was different from the one Seung had used to go to Canada and his parents only learned of him through this presentation on Central Community College. The recruiter's experience with Central was noted as a factor. According to Seung, he "had all the information about the college. He sends 5-10 Korean students to this college every year from his company."

Seung viewed the Central's website before his decision. He noted the pictures on the international portion had Asian students and it was important to see there were other Korean students at Central.

The rural location from Seung's perspective is not that different from the high school he attended in Nova Scotia and did not see this as a big transition for him.

Future goals

At the time of the interview, Seung had been admitted to a private for-profit four-year college in Chicago, where he will study engineering. He will leave Central before completing his Associate's Degree.

Wu

Prior to attending a community college

Wu graduated from a high school in Nebraska as an international student. The Hong Kong native had never been to the U.S. before he came at age 14 to be a high school student. He has been in the U.S. for four years.

When did you first start planning to study internationally?

His parents had asked him when he was 14 if he wanted to "get more experience." Wu admitted he was young at the time and indifferent. "I didn't really care, so I said 'why not?'"

Why did you decide on coming to the U.S.A to study?

According to Wu, “the reason I came here is to learn English.” His parents, who had never studied abroad, thought the U.S. education system was superior. “I think they (his parents) just thought the education here is better than anywhere.”

Wu found his high school in Nebraska through an agency which his father knew. The agency encouraged Wu to go to a rural location. “The agent told me that Nebraska is countryside and you have concentrated study. If you go to California or big city, you want to mess around instead of study.”

Wu would go to western Nebraska for three years and complete his high school degree although he did have to transition to the rural location. “When I got there, there was nothing except cows and corn. I was really disappointed. I got used to it after the first year. It was not that bad.”

Because Wu graduated in the U.S., this limited his chances to go to a Hong Kong university since he missed the placement tests taken during a student’s junior year of high school. “The test is very difficult so many students study here (U.S.) to skip the tests.”

How did you first learn about American community colleges and what did you like about them?

Wu first learned about community colleges from his high school teacher in Nebraska during his first year in the U.S. He remembers he was told about the transfer function of the community college. Later he heard “that if you go to a four-year college, after you graduate you will find a job better than if you go to a two-year college.”

Initially he only considered four-year colleges, particularly a private non-profit religious-based college in Texas with an aviation program. However, he would change his mind and would consider community colleges based on two factors, “First, it is cheaper. Second, they don’t require to take SAT or ACT.”

How did you first learn about your school and why did you decide on attending your school?

Wu returned to the same agency he used to find the high school in Nebraska to help him find a two-year college. He was given four choices – one in Florida, one in Ohio, and two in Illinois. He was unaware how these schools were selected for him.

Although he was unable to state why, he preferred Illinois over Ohio and Florida. “Why? I don’t know. It is close to Chicago I think.”

From the two community colleges in Illinois, Central and a neighboring community college system not in Study Illinois, he looked at the websites. “It (Central Community College) just looked better than the other one.” He also looked at the tuition rates of the four colleges and found Central’s tuition to be the cheapest.

The educational agent had some influence in the decision according to Wu. “My agent especially recommended Central” although he could not remember any specific reasons given.

Future goals

Wu is planning to transfer in the fall of 2008 to the private four-year college in Texas he had considered earlier when he was a high school student. He would only have one year of community college, but he is not interested in completing the Associate

degree. When asked why, Wu replied, “Because I want to be a pilot, and they don’t provide a program here.”

Gloria

Prior to attending a community college

Gloria had worked for an international cosmetic company for four years before coming to Central to study. She had never been to the U.S. before she started to study here. She had completed a two year post-secondary cosmetology program in South Korea which led to her job with the internationally known cosmetic company. She comes from the second largest city in South Korea, Pusan.

When did you first start planning to study internationally?

Gloria began planning two years prior when she was working for the cosmetic company. Before she came, she claimed to not be able to speak English.

Why did you decide on coming to the U.S.A to study?

She did not look at any other countries than the U.S. for her studies abroad. She looked to the U.S. for her career advancement. “I needed to get a higher position in the company. But they need English skills.”

How did you first learn about American community colleges and what did you like about them?

Gloria did not learn about community colleges until after she arrived at Central. She just thought it was “a cheaper college.”

How did you first learn about your school and why did you decide on attending your school?

Gloria learned about this school from the same agency which Seung worked with. She saw an advertisement in the newspaper when she was looking for U.S. study abroad agencies. When she went to meet with the educational agent, she told him she wanted “a cheap college. Then I said where there aren’t many Koreans.” Central Community College was recommended to her as meeting her criteria.

She had specifically wanted to further her background in her field by enrolling in a cosmetology program with a make-up course and was told by the educational agent that Central had this. Once she arrived, she learned that the cosmetology program does not have a make-up course.

She did not consider any other colleges or conducted her own research. When asked if she used any other resources, she responded, “no, I trusted the agency.”

Gloria did note that the agency told her about the rural location of the college. However, Gloria said, “actually I didn’t think about the location before I came here. Just for studying.” She emphasized she wanted to be in a setting in which she would have to speak English. “If I was in a big city, I couldn’t learn a lot of English.”

Future goals

Gloria has no intention to go on to a four-year program. She wants to complete a certificate program in marketing at Central and then go to New York City to attend a make-up institute before returning to her job in South Korea.

North Star Community College

Date of Interviews: March 24, 2008

Based on order of interview

Table 17. North Star Community College Participants

Participant	Gender	Nationality	Total Semesters Completed	Area of Study
Susan	Female	Malaysia	Three	Mathematics
Humberto	Male	Brazil	Three	Intl Business

Susan

Prior to attending a community college

Susan had come to the North Star district from Dallas, where her husband was studying. She had completed one semester of a graphic design program at a private college in Texas and a two-year associate degree in native Malaysia to be a computer system technician. She had never been to the U.S. before she arrived here with her husband, an Indian national, in 2005.

When did you first start planning to study internationally?

As the oldest child of four girls, Susan was expected to work after high school since her father passed away when she was 12. She started working at a bank for almost ten years while studying for an Associate degree in Malaysia to become a computer system technician. “A year after graduating I thought about going to America to study.”

Susan applied to several schools in the U.S. starting in 2005, but “it was so difficult because I didn’t know the places in America.” Nevertheless, Susan believes, “if you have a degree in America you’ll survive anywhere in the world. It’s well known no matter what because the standards of study in America is really, really good.”

Susan was also interested in studying in the U.K. “I liked the U.K. because I think I have more of a British accent than American accent.” She had even applied to five British schools by her estimations.

Why did you decide on coming to the U.S.A to study?

Susan’s decision to study here was the result of her marriage to an Indian national who had a brother in Dallas. He was intending to take the medical board exams and complete his MDS in the United States. As Susan describes it,

I would say it was a kind of force that brought me to the United States. It’s a commitment of a wife to a husband. It was my dream to study in America and come to America because I am not from a very rich family and I know I can’t make it by myself. So when my husband said that we were coming to America, I said ‘that’s great. That’s a good chance for me.’

How did you first learn about American community colleges and what did you like about them?

Susan started to attend a private for-profit college in Dallas for one semester in graphic design. According to Susan, the decision to attend this program was forced upon her. “It was all by force, a mathematician being in art school. Everyone was shocked, me going into art. That was not my field.”

However, it was her brother-in-law who first told her about community colleges and suggested she look there. “When I heard the word community college, I wondered they meant in America by community.” She started comparing the prices and noticed her monthly fee at the private college was equal to an entire semester at a community college. “That’s the first thing I did: I started comparing fees.”

In her research Susan felt the quality of education between a community college and university is the same. “The standard of education is the same and the teachers all graduated from the same school but chose to go to a community college instead of the 4 year college.”

She noted that Americans may perceive community college as a choice for “poor people.” Yet she believes once she transfers to a four-year school, “you’ll blend in and no one will ask you about where you went to school your first year.”

How did you first learn about your school and why did you decide on attending your school?

Susan applied to both four and two year colleges in Illinois when she learned they were planning to come to Illinois. Her husband had a friend who lived in North Star’s district and encouraged them to look in the area. Her husband’s friend knew the president of North Star and recommended this school to Susan. By staying at the friend’s house as a live-in guest, Susan was able to get the reduced tuition. She told her husband, “I said let me go to North Star College. It doesn’t make any difference. It’s better to go where we know somebody here.”

For Susan, the reason she came to North Star was “because the person who lives here and the fee. Most of all is the fee.”

Susan said she had to adjust to the location of North Star because the weather was quite different from her homeland in Malaysia and the town was much smaller than Kuala Lumpur. “It took me a year to like (the town).”

Future goals

At the beginning of her first semester at North Star, her husband left her and he stopped funding her shortly there after. She has been able to find work at the college and earned awards and scholarships to keep going. “I am a person with a lot of determination and I didn’t want to give up because I really love studying. I know I was getting older but I had the passion to study, and then I got the chance in America.”

Susan is looking at transferring to a nearby four-year university and major in mathematics. She would like to complete her Ph.D. in the next four years and become a university math professor.

Humberto

Prior to attending a community college

Humberto had completed one year at a private high school nearby North Star Community College. He had already completed high school in Brazil and had considered Brazilian universities. He had visited the U.S. for the first time the year before he became an international student.

When did you first start planning to study internationally?

At 18, Humberto first came to the US to play in a soccer tournament organized by his cousin and was named best player in the tournament.

Humberto had not thought about studying internationally before his visit. “I was just thinking about coming here for a little bit just to play the soccer tournament, get to know the place, and then go back home.”

A private high school in the area of North Star Community College offered him a full scholarship equal to \$12,000 after the tournament. Although he had completed his secondary schooling in Brazil, “I thought it would be a nice opportunity to learn from English.”

Why did you decide on coming to the U.S.A to study?

Humberto was accepted into university in Brazil and it was his parents’ preference that he study in Brazil. According to Humberto, “they (his parents) didn’t like it in the beginning, but they respected my opinion and let me stay.”

How did you first learn about American community colleges and what did you like about them?

Humberto looked at two large public universities in the Midwest which he wanted to attend, but decided against this. “It was basically the money because I didn’t have the money for the full four years. I know I had the money to go to two years. So I wanted to save some money for the first two years.”

When asked about English requirements for college, Humberto stated he did not think that he would have passed the Test of English as a Foreign Language required by most

colleges and university for entry into college level coursework. “If you come to a community college and you graduate from a high school in the US you don’t have to take the TOEFL test. You can transfer your grades and not take it. That’s one reason why I came here.”

How did you first learn about your school and why did you decide on attending your school?

Humberto first learned about community colleges from his cousin, whose soccer team would practice at North Star Community College.

He made an appointment with the international student director. They toured the campus. “We walked around and saw some classrooms and I saw the size of the classroom, smaller, less students. That was one thing I really liked it. It was like a bigger high school or something.”

Humberto also considered a nearby private school and a neighboring community college. He had visited the two campuses, but preferred North Star’s. “I really like the people (at North Star). I think they accept me pretty good. It was more friendly than the other places. That’s what I really like.”

His reasons for attending North Star: “first because the school was closer to me, second money wise. Coming to North Star for the first two years saves you a lot of money. That’s the reason I came here.” By living with his in-district cousin, Humberto qualifies for the “live-in guest” tuition rate.

Future goals

North Star does not have a soccer team, but he would like to play soccer at the four-year school he transfers to. He desires to get a partial scholarship to play soccer for one of the large public universities he looked at earlier.

After receiving a bachelor's in international business, Humberto would like to go back and work for his family's coffee business in Brazil.

City View Community College

Date of Interviews: April 3, 2008

Based on order of interview

Table 18. City View Community College Participants

Participant	Gender	Nationality	Total Semesters Completed	Area of Study
Yutaka	Male	Japan	Two	Business
Sadiq	Male	Azerbaijan	One	Computer science
Sachiko	Female	Japan	One	Graphic design
Johan	Male	Sweden	One	General education

Yutaka

Prior to attending a community college

Yutaka came to City View after studying at a for-profit language school in Chicago for a summer. His first trip to the U.S. was as an international student in a

summer ESL program in California in 2006. He returned to complete his bachelor's degree in agriculture in Japan before coming to Illinois.

When did you first start planning to study internationally?

He decided to study abroad at age 20. As Yutaka described it, "I looked at reality." He remembers meeting his classmate, an international student from Mongolia, who was studying agriculture with him in Japan. He had previously studied in the U.S. and India, so Yutaka thought "he has good knowledge about the international culture."

That same year he would take a trip to the U.K., his first trip to an English speaking country. Although he had been on trips to South Korea and China, the trip to the U.K. was different. "I got a very big cultural impact."

During this same year he decided to enroll in a three month program in San Francisco to study English in an ESL university program which he found through an agency. He selected this program because he wanted to study English in America and this was the closest program to his native Japan. "After I go back to Japan I didn't think San Francisco was a good place to study English because there are many Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans."

At the same time, his father was encouraging his study of English and western culture. "My father talked with me and said you are smarter than your other brothers, please help them."

Originally he thought about a school for English in Japan, but he wanted the cultural experience as well. "I want to come here and get some imagination. It's a good

effect for me.” Therefore, with his father’s support he started to look for schooling in English speaking countries.

Why did you decide on coming to the U.S.A to study?

Initially Yutaka considered the U.K. because he thought the pronunciation in the U.K. was “very good,” but he saw the U.S. in a different light. “The U.S. is the center of the world and many people want to come here and many people want to get success here.” He only applied to the U.S.

He went to the same agency which he used to find the summer ESL program. He only requested a school to study business in a large size city. Although he is from a small community in western Japan, he requested a “big city” location “because the big cities are safer than the countryside. And I like the big city.”

He was given three schools for each of the four cities- New York, Boston, Chicago, and Seattle. He began to consider the four cities first before looking at the schools. Because of his experience in San Francisco, he assumed there would be a large number of Asian people on the west coast, so he eliminated Seattle. He wanted to go the east coast since, “the east coast has the main towns of the U.S., Boston, New York, or some places and the east cost is close to Europe.” However, his father did not want him to be too far from Japan.

Yutaka found information on the internet about the three remaining cities and found it to be a “typical American city.” Additionally, he had a cousin in Illinois at one of the public research universities in the middle of the state. “If I had problems I could

ask and get help from her.” He did not contact his cousin until after he decided to come to Illinois.

How did you first learn about American community colleges and what did you like about them?

Yutaka did not know what a community college was until he came here. Although City View uses “Community College” in its name, he did not try to find out its meaning in making his decision.

His father gave him the opportunity to study for two years, so the Associate degree program was attractive to Yutaka. “I want to graduate for two years. I don’t need to transfer because I already graduated from my university.”

How did you first learn about your school and why did you decide on attending your school?

City View was the only community college of the three choices he had received from the agency and it was also the only suburban location. One was located downtown and the other was in a more rural location. Excluding the rural school, Yutaka strategized, “Before I came to the U.S. I picked City View and (the downtown school). I planned to study for two months at (the downtown school) before I came to City View.” The downtown location was a private for-profit language school. Yutaka wanted the experience of living downtown, but the tuition and the cost of living in the city was “3 to 4 times as much as City View.”

Yutaka reviewed the City View catalog and found “the place is very suitable.” He liked the location being close to downtown and the airports and he thought “I could make friends with American students and get in classes with them.”

Future goals

After completing his Associate’s degree in Business, Yutaka plans to help his father and brothers with the family business with his English skills and cultural knowledge. He would like to stay if he can find a job here, but he believes it is difficult with the current economy.

Sadiq

Prior to attending a community college

Sadiq came to City View after one year of college in his native Azerbaijan. He had never been to the U.S. before he started school here. He had studied at language schools in Moscow and Istanbul before he started college.

When did you first start planning to study internationally?

Sadiq’s parents started talking to him about studying internationally at age 10. “They said when you are 13-14 years old it would be the right time for you to go.”

When he turned 13, he went to Moscow to study Russian for two years. Russian is taught in Sadiq’s school as a second language, but he thought it would be easier to learn the language in the country. According to Sadiq, going to Moscow to study Russian at 13 is very common and he had other friends doing the same.

When he returned, it was the end of the school year in Azerbaijan and it was difficult to start. One of Sadiq's friends had been studying Turkish in Istanbul and invited him to come there. Sadiq said he was interested in Turkish since the Azerbaijani language and culture is similar. He was there for about eight months before returning to complete high school.

"After I graduated from high school, I decided I wanted to come to the U.S. to study here but at that time my English wasn't very good." Therefore, Sadiq planned to work on his English for one year in Azerbaijan before coming.

After the one year, Sadiq thought his English was OK because he could understand most of what he read in English. His mother was also a teacher of English and French and would help him practice.

Why did you decide on coming to the U.S.A to study?

Sadiq had considered Switzerland, England, Canada, and the U.S. for studying. He had friends who went to Switzerland and Canada for university, but he believed it was hard for them to get a good job. "Almost everyone graduates from the U.S. they can get very good jobs because the U.S. diploma is known worldwide, so you can find jobs everywhere." Sadiq then planned to make the U.S. his first goal followed by Canada and maybe London.

Next Sadiq considered where he would study in the U.S. "I like big cities like Chicago and New York, so I thought that would be a very good chance for me." Although he did not know anyone in Chicago, he was attracted to the city "because I speak Russian I saw that there were a lot of Slavic people here especially Polish, so I

thought it would be easier for me.” In addition to Chicago and New York, he also considered San Antonio since he had a friend who studied at a private non-profit university there.

How did you first learn about American community colleges and what did you like about them?

Sadiq went to the U.S.-Azerbaijan Education Center in the capitol of Baku. The Center, built in 2003, houses a number of U.S. Department of State-funded educational programs and is an extension of the U.S. Embassy services. According to Sadiq, “Everybody that wants to study in the U.S. goes there and asks for advice, so I did. And they advise me about community colleges.”

Sadiq remembers being told “first of all it will be easier for me to study.” As he describes it, “a community college is lower than a university so it will be easier for us to improve our English and see what is going on here.” From this Sadiq was told he would become accustomed to the U.S. educational system.

When asked what impressed him the most about community colleges at this time, Sadiq identified the ease of transferring to universities. As Sadiq explains,

From university in my country, it is hard to transfer to university here, but if I transfer to community college, it will be next step; it will be like a bridge between university in my country and university in the U.S.

He had gone to the education center with his friends and they were all advised the same thing. From that point on, he only looked at community colleges.

How did you first learn about your school and why did you decide on attending your school?

First, Sadiq looked on the internet at community colleges in the New York City area, but he was unable to find one he liked. He particularly looked at articulation agreements. The possible transfer institutions listed from the New York City area community colleges “were just ordinary universities that I could transfer to.” He desired schools with a high level reputation.

When looking in the Chicago area, he found City View listed the University of Chicago as a transfer institution. He contacted an international student advisor at City View by email to see if he could transfer to other schools he liked such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. He was told he could.

The website was Sadiq’s first contact with City View. “I saw their website and really liked it and after researching I decided to apply.”

In addition to the transfer and articulation agreements, Sadiq also looked at the number of international students at the school. “I saw a lot of international students from 70 countries and thought that would be a good place to go.” He only applied to City View, no other schools.

Sadiq also noted the immediate responses he would get by email to his inquiries. For him, “it shows they are responsible and they want to give the information very quickly.”

He was surprised by the location of the school in the suburbs, which he felt was far from downtown. “Because the universities and schools in my country are downtown so I thought it would be the same here.”

Future goals

Sadiq is planning to transfer to a university to get a Bachelor's degree, find work, complete a Master's degree and then return back to his country. He specifically changed his major from business to computer science because "it will be more helpful in my country."

Sachiko

Prior to attending a community college

Sachiko came directly to City View from high school in a suburb of Tokyo. She came to the U.S for the first time at age 16 and spent ten months at a Florida high school.

When did you first start planning to study internationally?

Sachiko first considered studying abroad when she was in 9th grade after seeing the academy award winning movie musical, "Chicago." According to Sachiko, this was a life changing event since she hated English before she saw this movie. "I need to learn English to really understand the movie."

In high school, she met an American exchange student from Illinois, who would later become her boyfriend. For Sachiko, "it really made my mind up to go to the States."

Why did you decide on coming to the U.S.A to study?

Sachiko did not consider any other countries to study English because of her interest in American culture particularly motion pictures. When asked why she did not consider closer options to Japan such as Australia, Sachiko responded, "but America is the country of movies."

Sachiko believes having a boyfriend in the U.S. helped her get her parents approval to attend high school there. “If I had no one who I know in the States, I know they (her parents) would have thought it was dangerous to just go there alone. So it kind of helped my parents let me go to America.”

She used a high school agency in Tokyo to help her find a school in Illinois, but they told her that they were unable to find one. Sachiko suspects they were lying to her since she told them about her boyfriend in Illinois. “They kind of forbid that kind of relationship stuff because we might do something bad like getting pregnant or something. So they made me go to Florida.”

Even though it was not Illinois, she still wanted to go to the U.S. because “I wanted to learn English.” Once she was there, she realized she wasn’t going to university in Japan. “I thought ‘man, I fit in here more than Japan.’ So you know what I am not going to Japan for college or anything.”

How did you first learn about American community colleges and what did you like about them?

Sachiko went back to Japan to finish high school and began to find colleges to go to during her senior year. She went to another agency she found in a book about studying in America. It was the only agency she consulted.

She told the agency she wanted to go to Chicago and study graphic design. It also had to be affordable. Although she had such specifics that she could have done the research herself, she preferred to use the agency. “I was too lazy to research it by myself.”

The agency gave her a list of colleges in Chicago with graphic design, but only a few were affordable. Sachiko really liked one private non-profit 4-year college in Chicago because of its reputation in her area of interest. Sachiko recalls telling them “I want to go there so bad but the price is so expensive, so is there any other way to get in there somehow?”

At that point, the agency suggested community college as a way to save money and transfer in. “They said you can get the same kind of class or credit at a cheaper price and you can just transfer afterwards.”

According to Sachiko, the price was the biggest factor for her. She also saw the community college path as the “only way” to get to her desired college.

How did you first learn about your school and why did you decide on attending your school?

The agency suggested two community colleges, one downtown and City View. The agency told her City View “has a bunch of international students so they know what they do with international students.”

Sachiko really wanted to live in Chicago, but she was concerned about finding a place to stay. Her boyfriend lived on the other end of the state some three hours away and did not factor into her decision according to Sachiko.

Sachiko was drawn to City View because “it is the only community college with a host program, close to Chicago.” She is staying with a host family through this program as she did when she lived in Florida.

She was told of the suburban location by the agency, but from her experience this was not a concern. “I know what a suburb is.”

Future goals

Sachiko hopes to transfer to the private non-profit college in Chicago to complete her degree in graphic design. After getting her degree, she intends to work in the United States.

Johan

Prior to attending a community college

Johan came directly to City View from a high school in Sweden with an international program in which classroom instruction, homework, and computer programs were all in English. Johan described his hometown as “a really, really small town of 2,000 people.” He had never studied abroad before and his only other visit to the U.S. was a two week visit in February 2007 of his final year of high school.

When did you first start planning to study internationally?

Johan said he had selected the international program at his high school because he was interested in international business, his grandmother is British, and he wanted a challenge.

He started thinking about studying abroad his last year in high school. He felt secure enough in his English that he wanted to try to work on his French in France. “But my French isn’t too good so I decided to go someplace else where they speak English. So it was basically England or the United States.”

He did not consider going to a Swedish university because he did not want to study in Swedish. His parents were initially concerned with his decision. “At first when I said I wanted to go study abroad, they didn’t understand why because it is free in Sweden, but they supported me.”

Why did you decide on coming to the U.S.A to study?

As he began to look at schools in the U.S. and U.K., he changed his mind and decided to focus just on the U.S. When asked why, Johan responded, “It seemed so boring. I have been visiting the U.K., but I didn’t like it, just London. The U.S. was new, big, cooler, get away from Europe.”

Johan went to an agency in the nearby city of Gothenburg to help him find schools. The only instructions he gave were, “I wanted to go abroad and study in English so give me some choices.”

The agency started with schools in California, then Florida and New York, but these were too expensive for Johan. Although his parents had encouraged him to pursue his goal of studying in the U.S. with some money they saved and loans, Johan said, “I didn’t want to be in debt for my entire life.”

He was then presented with City View Community College, which to Johan, “was cheap compared to everything else.”

How did you first learn about American community colleges and what did you like about them?

Since City View has community college in its name, Johan asked the educational agent what a community college was. “They said it is sponsored by the government or something. That is why it is cheaper than a private school.”

Johan also liked that he could start at City View and transfer to someplace else. “It seemed perfect,” according to Johan.

How did you first learn about your school and why did you decide on attending your school?

Johan noted four areas: the price, the housing program, Chicago, and the small class size as reasons for him to select City View.

Although he was interested in staying in a college dorm, he was interested in staying with a host family. “To live with an American family to get experience and all the cultural benefits, it is a one chance in a lifetime.” He did not know anyone in the area, so this option was attractive.

He liked the city of Chicago, but he was surprised by City View’s location. “I expect a bigger campus. I was expecting dorms and that kind of stuff and not be in the middle of nowhere as it is now.”

Johan learned about the class sizes from the brochure which he received from the school. He also looked at the college website before making his decision.

Future goals

Johan's plans are to finish his Associate's degree and then transfer to a university in San Francisco where one of his friends is going for a three year exchange program. He is hoping his other friends from Sweden will join him, but he is the only one in the U.S. at the time of the interview. Once he completes his Bachelor's degree in business, he intends to start working. As Johan said, "I don't want to be in school anymore than I need to."

Hawthorne County Community College

Date of Interviews: April 9, 2008

Based on order of interview

Table 19. Hawthorne County Community College Participants

Participant	Gender	Nationality	Total Semesters Completed	Area of Study
Karen	Female	Vietnam	Two	Communications
Faye	Female	Hong Kong	One	Undecided
Ajay	Male	Indian	One	Engineering

Karen

Prior to attending a community college

Karen had come to Hawthorne directly from high school in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. She had never been to the U.S. before she started school here.

When did you first start planning to study internationally?

Karen had first started thinking about studying internationally when her parents asked her about it in high school. She wanted to study acupuncture in her home country of Vietnam. Her parents encouraged her to go abroad since she had relatives living in the U.S. and Australia. “They told me they wanted me to go abroad to study and they think it is better for me.”

Going abroad to study is not uncommon for Karen’s classmates. She thought that about 70% of her classmates in high school decided to study in another country, but only “two or three of them for sure knew what they wanted to do in another country and were sure about their future.” Karen felt she should have thought about this earlier so that she could have selected an appropriate major. She changed her major as a result of her decision to study abroad.

Why did you decide on coming to the U.S.A to study?

Karen began to conduct her own research on acupuncture programs in China and Japan because of their strength in this field. She looked through books and websites. She knew Japan would be very expensive to study and live whereas China would be similar to Vietnam although “China’s life is very hard if you are new.”

Although she did not see cultural differences as a big concern, language was. “I won’t have much problem with the new culture but I know I would have problems with the language. To me language is a big problem.”

According to Karen, her parents wanted her to go someplace where she had relatives to help her. She had one aunt in Australia and the rest of her relatives were in

the U.S., most in Hawthorne County. “If I go to the U.S., I have more convenience with help from relatives and I can speak English better than Chinese or Japanese. It is better for studying, so I chose it.” This decision meant she would no longer study acupuncture, but communications, which she chose because “I want to speak English better.”

How did you first learn about American community colleges and what did you like about them?

She initially looked at schools in New York because she liked New York University and Columbia, which she learned about from the internet. “I like big universities, but they are all expensive.” Her parents also wanted her to choose a place where she had relatives and there was no one they knew in New York City.

Karen’s uncle, who graduated from a school in California where he still lives, encouraged Karen to not just choose a big university, but one “that is good for you that have your major.”

Karen was familiar with community colleges in her native Vietnam, but learned about U.S. community colleges from her agency. Her parents had found the agency by asking their friends who had children studying abroad.

When they reviewed Karen’s grades, area of study, and English proficiency, they recommended she enroll in a community college first and then transfer because of her English ability. According to Karen, “most of the students (in Vietnam) that don’t have English proficiency usually start with community college first.” She also knew other friends who had done this, so this recommendation was not a surprise for her.

How did you first learn about your school and why did you decide on attending your school?

According to Karen, her relatives who live near Hawthorne County Community College had not told her about the school before she met with the agency, but became involved later when the agency contacted her aunt there.

Although the agency provided a list of schools in the area, Karen felt she did not have a choice. "I always have to choose a school near relatives so I really don't have a choice actually." So for Karen, "this is the best school and the closest one to my relatives."

Karen said she trusted her aunt because she lived in Hawthorne County and thought the community college was good although she would have preferred to have gone to a 4-year university instead.

When asked, Karen admitted her biggest influence in the process was her parents. "I listened to my parents and I do things for them."

Future goals

Karen is deciding on a minor with her major in communications. She would like to finish her Associate's, transfer and get her Bachelor's. Then she would like to get a Master's in art communication. She will stay in the U.S. if she finds a job; otherwise, she will return to her country.

Faye

Prior to attending a community college

Faye had come to Hawthorne directly from high school in Hong Kong. She had never been to the U.S. before she started school here.

When did you first start planning to study internationally?

When Faye was in 11th grade, she was concerned that she would not get into a university in Hong Kong. As Faye describes it, entry into a Hong Kong University is “very competitive. Maybe only one or two out of 40 get in.” She knew a degree would be needed because, “in terms of income, you will have lower income than others who have a degree.”

Faye’s classmates were going abroad to California, Australia, and England and her parents and her U.S.-based aunt were willing to support her studies abroad.

Why did you decide on coming to the U.S.A to study?

Faye considered studying in Singapore “because I have another aunt who recommended me to go there because the system is quite good she thinks.” However, like the universities in Hong Kong, they were also difficult to get into and so she did not apply.

Faye’s aunt, who studied in Australia, had encouraged her to apply to schools in the U.S., where Faye’s aunt was now living.

How did you first learn about American community colleges and what did you like about them?

Faye started to look at 4-year universities in the U.S. by looking at college websites for programs in criminology. According to Faye, “I wanted to get into some school that Hong Kong people were familiar with because Hong Kong people value them whether the school is prestigious or not.” However, she found the requirements were “quite high” and did not think she could get into these schools.

Faye’s aunt in the U.S. suggested she go to a community college and “start over again.” She was attracted to the fact that the requirements were “not very high” and she could later transfer to another school after doing well at the community college.

How did you first learn about your school and why did you decide on attending your school?

Faye’s aunt told her about Hawthorne, which was 25 minutes away from her home. She remembers her aunt telling her,

It is a big institution that provides you with opportunities for you to study because the requirements aren’t high, it’s easy to get into and after studying for 45 credit hours you can transfer to another institution and possibility they won’t look at your high school transcript.

Faye liked the idea that her transcripts would not negatively affect her admission and she would be able to stay with her aunt. Because of her aunt’s involvement, Faye did not go to an agency to find the school. “My aunt took care of everything.”

Future goals

Faye would like to transfer to a private Boston-based university where some of her friends are studying. She is looking forward to the independence of living on her own. After completing her Bachelor's degree, she would like to return to Hong Kong because she believes there will be opportunities there.

*Ajay**Prior to attending a community college*

Ajay had come to Hawthorne directly from high school in Saudi Arabia, where his father is working for an American company. Ajay had completed all of his schooling up to 10th grade in his native India with the last three years at a high school managed by the Indian government in Saudi Arabia. He had never been to the U.S. before he started school here.

When did you first start planning to study internationally?

Ajay's plan was to finish his high school in Saudi Arabia and then go back to college in India like most of his high school classmates. He had applied to seven schools in India to study engineering.

Ajay got accepted into the Indian universities, but his admission required a customary donation from the parents to secure his spot in the program. This was problematic for Ajay's father since he could not go in person to India to do this. "My dad didn't want to pay a donation. Unless they tell you that you can get in without any donation, then you can go in India."

He did not consider going to university in Saudi Arabia because “as an ex-pat, the course are pretty limited to you.”

Both of his older sisters had attended Hawthorne County Community College, so he was aware of this option. However, Ajay thought his chances of getting a U.S. visa were slim. As he describes it, “The U.S. would not give a U.S. visa to Saudi nationals and Saudi ex-pats coming from Saudi. So the case of coming to U.S. from Saudi was less than 2% of 2%.” Still it was his eldest sister who lived near Hawthorne that advised, “let him try to get admissions someplace else than India. If he gets it, let him come.”

Why did you decide on coming to the U.S.A to study?

Ajay applied to Hawthorne and a large university in Australia. He had a friend studying at the university in Australia whom he could stay with. He was admitted to both schools and so it just depended on getting his student visa. The Australian university told him they were unsure whether he would be able to get a student visa applying in Saudi.

According to Ajay, the U.S. was his first choice “because my sister was here. I would be saving a lot of money because of my housing.”

Ajay never applied for the visa for Australia because he received the U.S. visa. He told them at the interview that although India had strong engineering programs, he preferred the U.S. because “I liked the way they teach with computers and all this software in teaching the modern way.”

How did you first learn about American community colleges and what did you like about them?

Ajay first learned about community colleges from his sisters. His eldest sister completed her bachelor's degree in computer science in India and then married an Indian with a U.S. residency. She decided to change her profession to pharmacy and took her coursework at Hawthorne.

His other sister would come to Hawthorne from high school in Saudi Arabia as an F-1 international student, the same path as Ajay.

The biggest advantage of community colleges in Ajay's opinion was the financial savings. "University classes are much costly than classes here at Hawthorne or any other community colleges."

How did you first learn about your school and why did you decide on attending your school?

Ajay relied on his sisters for all the information on Hawthorne County Community College. He was told it is one of the best community colleges in Illinois. Ajay recalls being told that you can ask questions of the instructors before, during, and after class. "At the community college you have the instructors still helping you out each time."

Future goals

Ajay plans to finish his engineering degree in the U.S. and then return to Saudi Arabia working for a U.S. company like his father.

Discussion of Participants' Demographic Data

Past Experience of the Participants

The majority of students interviewed for this study were of traditional college age between 18-22 years old. Only four participants were older than 22 by a few years. Despite the youth of this group of participants, there is a degree of depth to their international experience prior to becoming international students at Illinois community colleges. All but five of the participants had previous study abroad experience. Of those five studying abroad for the first time, three came directly from high school. The opportunities for studying abroad appear to start well before college in these examples. In the earliest case, Sadiq started thinking about studying abroad outside of Azerbaijan when he was 10. More participants had studied abroad during high school (6) than had completed some post-secondary work (4). Moreover, three out of the six participants who had never been to the U.S. before had studied abroad during high school. Community colleges should be aware that global experiences of their international students may go beyond their country of origin and neophyte international students could be in the minority. Table 20 demonstrated the past study abroad and higher education experiences of the participants.

Table 20. Past Experience of Participants

Name	Past travel to US	Past studies abroad	Past college experience
Mary	Came in 2003 with husband	none	None
Seung	None	Studied at a high school in Nova Scotia	None
Wu	When 14 came to Nebraska	Studied at a high school in Nebraska	None
Gloria	None	none	2 years in home country
Susan	Came to Texas with her husband prior to NSCC	Studied design in Dallas	2 years in home country
Humberto	9 month visit in 2004, stayed on second visit	Studied at a private high school near NSCC	None
Yutaka	Summer in San Francisco in 2006	Language schools in California and Chicago	Complete Bachelor's in Agriculture in home country
Sadiq	None	Language schools in Russia & Turkey while in high school	1 year of Intl Economic Relations in home country
Sachiko	10 months in Florida in 2006	Studied at a high school in Florida	None

Name	Past travel to US	Past studies abroad	Past college experience
Johan	2 weeks in Feb. 2007	none	None
Karen	None	none	None
Faye	None	none	None
Ajay	None	Went to high school in Saudi Arabia	None

Other Countries Considered

Participants had other countries to consider for their international study including their home country. Surprisingly, six of the 13 participants did not even consider their home country for study. The demographic information revealed that suburban based participants were more likely to consider countries other than the United States as a study destination. Table 21 illustrates the countries the participants considered and the factors which contributed to their selection.

Table 21. Other Countries Considered for Post-Secondary Study

Name	Home Country Schools	Other Countries	Reasons to consider the other countries
Mary	Considered prior to marriage, did not attend	None	
Seung	None	None	
Wu	None	None	
Gloria	Completed 2yr program	None	
Susan	Completed 2 yr program	UK	Liked London, preferred British pronunciation
Humberto	Considered and applied, but did not attend	None	
Yutaka	Completed Bachelor's	UK	For English, "pronunciation is very good"
Sadiq	Completed just 1 year	Switzerland, Canada, and UK	For English, friends living there
Sachiko	None	None	
Johan	None	France & UK	Improve language skills-France, For English-UK
Karen	None	China & Japan	For acupuncture programs
Faye	None	Singapore	Quality of education
Ajay	Applied to 7 schools, but did not attend	Australia	Quality of school, friend living there

The use of English as a *lingual franca* or global language has been a significant factor for international student enrollment. Not surprisingly Great Britain and the United States are the top two destination countries for international students. Research conducted by the Institute of International Education showed 68% of international students studying in the U.S. cited “proficiency in English” as a factor for studying the U.S. (Obst & Foster, 2006 p. 18-19). This was the second reason cited right after “reputation of academic qualifications or degree in the United States.” Chen and Barnett (2000) in their historical look at international student enrollment patterns predicted that, “rapid expansion of Asian students, particularly from the East Asian countries studying in English-speaking countries, suggests the language barriers are declining in importance” (p. 450). Interestingly, Karen in Vietnam had excluded other Asian countries like China and Japan in part because “I can speak English better than Chinese or Japanese.”

Despite a number of English speaking countries, only the United Kingdom was cited by more than one participant. Two students cited British pronunciation as the reason for including the U.K. and two students specifically mentioned London. Yet, two of the four students who had considered the U.K. used the same adjective “old” to describe why they selected the U.S., which they perceived to be “new”.

Reasons cited for studying in the United States varied but centered on some common themes. One is the perception of the U.S. as being the global cultural center not far removed from Wallerstein’s description of the core in his World System Theory. The following examples illustrate this:

“The U.S. is the center of the world and many people want to come here and many people want to get success here” –Yutaka

“America is the country of movies...Really, the movies are like everything to me”

–Sachiko

“The U.S. was new, big, cooler, get away from Europe” –Johan

Another theme which emerges is the quality of U.S. education. While participants generally had positive comments about the U.S. higher education system, only one spoke negatively about his home country. The praise given to the U.S. system was not at the expense of their own countries, but rather a feeling a U.S. education makes one prepared for a globalized world. This is exemplified in the following quotes:

“American education is the best” –Mary

“I think they (his parents) just thought the education here is better than anywhere”

–Wu

“I know if you have a degree in America you’ll survive anywhere in the world”-

Susan

This theme is further illustrated by the idea in which one is better trained for their career if they have a U.S. degree. These selections from the interviews embody this theme:

“Almost everyone graduates from the U.S. they can get very good jobs because the U.S. diploma is known worldwide, so you can find jobs everywhere” –Sadiq

“If I graduate here, it will be easier to get a job” –Seung

Future Goals of the Participants

Table 22 displays the intended goals of the participants during their time at the community college and beyond. For a majority of the participants, an associate’s degree

and bachelor's degree was a goal. The only two participants not interested in pursuing a bachelor's degree (Yutaka and Gloria) already had academic credentials and employment waiting upon their return to their home country.

Table 22. Future Goals of Participants

Name	Associate's degree	Transfer to 4-year	Post-Baccalaureate?	Stay in U.S. after studies
Mary	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Seung	No	Yes	No	Yes
Wu	No	Yes	No	Yes
Gloria	No	No	No	No
Susan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Humberto	Yes	Yes	No	No
Yutaka	Yes	No	No	No
Sadiq	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Sachiko	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Johan	Yes	Yes	No	Maybe
Karen	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maybe
Faye	Yes	Yes	No	No
Ajay	Yes	Yes	No	No

The associate's degree was seen as a stepping stone to the bachelor's degree, but not all students shared this opinion. The male international students at Central had already

applied to four-year institutions to transfer to at the time of the interview. Neither Seung nor Wu intended to complete their studies at the community college, which they viewed as a pathway into the U.S. education system.

Only three participants had indicated their intentions to extend their studies beyond a bachelor's degree. This may be a reflection of the participants' choice of major and career as much as the student's inability or desire to look beyond a bachelor's degree. One exception was Susan, who included plans to pursue a doctorate to reach her goal of becoming a math professor.

The participants' intention to stay in the United States after their studies was almost evenly divided. Two of the participants had indicated that they would stay in the United States if the opportunity to stay presented itself. The participants from the rural community colleges more often intended to stay in the U.S. compared to their suburban counterparts.

Observations of the Interviews and Reflections

All the interviews conducted for this study were done on the participants' campus during the school day at times convenient for their class schedule. The researcher made attempts to ease the participants into the interview with general commonly asked questions such as "What are you studying?" or "How long have you been studying here?" The researcher did not observe any noticeable signs of nervousness or being uncomfortable. The students participating in the study seemed genuinely relaxed and had no trouble or hesitation in answering the interview questions. Although the participants were given an interview guide immediately prior to the interview, only three of the

participants looked at the guide once the interview started. The guide may have contributed to their comfort level since they had an idea of the types of questions they would be asked but without enough time for them to rehearse their answers. Yin (2003) posits that in case studies it is more often the interviewer than the interviewee who may be uncomfortable.

You must cater to the interviewee's schedule and availability, not your own. The nature of the interview is much more open-ended, and an interviewee may not necessarily cooperate fully in answering the questions...As a result, your behavior – and not that of the subject or respondent – is the one likely to be constrained. (Yin, 2003, p. 72)

The settings for the interviews were very similar although they were in different locations. The interviews at Central and Hawthorne were conducted in an empty classroom at a quiet part of the building. The interviews at North Star were done in a private conference room, while City View interviews were done in a vacated office. Both North Star and City View interview rooms were near the International Student Office and provided adequate amount of privacy. In all the settings, the researcher sat across from the participant on the other side of a table to conduct the interview.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of the study is to identify what factors lead international students to decide to attend Illinois community colleges. The four driving research questions serve as organizers of the data gathered in order to shed light on or answer the research purpose.

Research Question # 1 *What factors weigh most predominantly in the students' decisions to attend a community college?*

Interviews with the 13 participants were coded and analyzed to garner the emerging themes. Table 23 compiles the factors identified by the participants when making their decision to attend a community college. The three most predominate factors which emerged are cost, location, and the transfer function.

Table 23. Most Mentioned Factors in Deciding to Attend a Community College

Factor	Number of participants identified	Terms used by participants
Financial Considerations	10	Lower tuition fees, cost savings, affordable, lower expenses, cheaper, save money
Location of community college	9	Close to family/friends (6 participants) Close to large city (3 participants)
Transfer function	5	Bridge to universities in the U.S., a way to get into four-year schools in the U.S.
Easier entry requirements	3	Save you time – no need to test, can start over if grades are bad
Best place to develop English skills	3	Place to start when English proficiency is low, easier to improve English at a community college

Financial Considerations

Even though the students may have decided to study abroad, the ability to do so is predicated on financial terms. Unsurprisingly with the financial world crisis, the most frequently identified factor among the research participants relates to financial issues.

The majority of the participants (10 of 13) selected community colleges rather than U. S.

universities to attend because of lower tuition and a cost savings for general living expenses. The participants who indicated financial considerations appeared to have a *price break*, a point in which the costs can become a push instead of a pull if it exceeds a certain threshold. The theme of affordability is identified at different points throughout their decision-making process. Gloria started her decision making process by asking a private educational agency specifically for “a cheap college.” Conversely, Wu made his final decision on schools strictly based on price. When asked what attracted him to Central Community College, Wu replied, “Tuition, it was cheaper.” Sachiko and Johan ruled out the initial choices provided by their private educational agencies because according to Johan, “they were too expensive for my taste.” Ajay, who applied to school in Australia and his native India, described the process for the international student as follows,

For any international students, first they check is the money affordable or not. They can afford to go to this college this much money a semester or it is better to go to some other college and getting the same thing done for a much cheaper cost.

Of equal importance is the students’ belief that the cost of the education could not exceed the benefits of studying abroad. Johan passed up a free university education in his native Sweden to study in the United States and thus anticipated a significant increase in the cost of his higher education. Nevertheless, Johan turned to community colleges because, “I didn’t want to be in debt for my entire life.” Substantial expenses are expected for the international student as compared to staying in their home country to study. Relative costs of community colleges make studying in the United States more palatable.

All of the participants who were interested in pursuing a bachelor's degree (11 of the 13) had initially considered four-year universities. Community college tuition rates compare very favorably to four-year institutions. Mary, whose husband was enrolled as a graduate student at a U.S. public research university, noted, "I found I could go to college and could afford it. It is cheaper than my husband's." Likewise, Susan, whose ex-husband was also enrolled in a U.S. public research university, said, "you can save a lot of money at a community college." Participants like Johan and Sachiko, who began investigating four year institutions through private educational agencies, noticed the price difference as well.

The price of education was still of a particular concern for the two participants not interested in transferring to a bachelor's degree program, Yutaka and Gloria. Their motivation to study abroad was based on becoming more global for career advancement or as Yutaka describes, "I want to come here and get some imagination. It's a good effect for me." Yutaka had already completed his Bachelor's in Japan and wanted to be able to bring a global perspective to the family business. Gloria had temporarily left her career in the cosmetic industry for additional training before returning to her home country of South Korea. For them, the type of school was not relevant just as long as it was an inexpensive college. According to Gloria, Central Community College was "just a cheaper college" when she made her decision to attend. Yutaka weighed the cost of living expenses of schools in the city and suburbs before settling on City View. With these two international students' focus more on career enhancement, the costs of a program had to be priced appropriately to balance with their goals.

The savings cited by the participants were not exclusively tuition. Some spoke of cost savings for living expenses when they chose a suburban location. Sachiko and Yutaka both had expressed an interest in studying in downtown Chicago, but the cost of housing brought them out to the suburbs. “Living downtown is pretty expensive. An apartment fee here is lower than downtown,” said Yutaka. Although students at the rural community college did not specifically relate their cost savings to their location, all rural based international students cited financial considerations as a factor.

Interestingly, all participants who considered financial concerns to be a factor when making their decision believed the lower costs at a community college did not lessen the quality of education they would receive. Mary described the community college as a “mini-university” and felt the institutions had all the resources and facilities required. In comparing community colleges with four-year universities, Susan retorted, “They teach the same thing, they are going to be the same smart people, and they are going to deliver the same education.”

In the interviews, some participants acknowledged but yet dismissed the negative perception regarding the quality of community colleges. As Susan commented,

If you tell someone wealthy that you are going to a community college, they'll think we are poor people. But for someone who is really educated, it is good choice because the standard of education is the same...I would tell my sisters and friends if you want to come here and save your money, go to community college and don't care what people say.

Relevance for Community Colleges

Community colleges need to acknowledge and understand the powerful influence financial factors play in international students' selection of an international post-secondary institution. Student financial aid is not available for these students and all their expenses are funded by themselves or their families. In the cases of students pursuing bachelor's degrees, tuition costs are more favorable for community colleges as compared to four-year colleges and universities. However, with little knowledge about two-year institutions, community colleges are typically not the first choice of the international students. Therefore, community colleges need to maintain a level of sophistication in their website and promotional materials on par with four-year institutions to convey the message that cost savings and a quality education are found at community colleges.

The study also found international students investigated two-year institutions within a geographic region. Therefore, it is crucial for each community college to be competitively priced with other two-year institutions in their area. North Star Community College's "living-in guest rate" is one strategy which addresses this factor.

With community college international students being extremely cost conscious, the marketing materials of community colleges must include information regarding a variety of cost savings their college can offer. For example, information on the relative value in cost of living expenses in the suburbs and rural locations would assist potential students in their decision process. In addition, colleges could promote particular housing arrangements positioned close to campus or access to affordable public transportation.

Location of the Community College

Students mentioned the location as factor either because of its proximity to a large city or to family and friends. This was a theme found in studies done with international students at urban and suburban community colleges (Doku, 2007; Zeszotarski, 2003). While Zeszotarski's participants had cited being drawn to Santa Monica Community College because of its location to the entertainment industry and a major city, Doku's Midwestern participants noted location near family and friends in urban and suburban locations.

In this study, Chicago is a pulling factor for international students at one school, but family and friends are significant for two other schools. Three of the four students interviewed at City View noted the college's proximity 12 miles from Chicago as a factor for them selecting City View. In the cases of Sachiko and Yutaka, both wanted to study downtown, but the costs involved pushed them out to a community college in the suburbs. Desiring to come to Chicago since she saw the Oscar winning film of the same name, Sachiko said, "I wanted to be in downtown really, but this is close enough here to go to Chicago." Under her breath she commented, "Oh my god, I'm so obsessed with Chicago." Yutaka experienced living downtown two months before coming to City View, but found the suburban location to be more affordable and "an easier place to go downtown and close to Midway and O'Hare airport." Johan also cited his interest in Chicago in selecting City View. Although Sadiq had narrowed his choices of U.S. locations to include Chicago because of its large Slavic speaking community, he pointed to other factors having more influence when making his final decision.

None of the participants at suburban Hawthorne Community College mentioned the closeness of Chicago (36 miles away) as factor. Instead, all three participants mentioned the school's location to family as a key reason for their decision. For Karen and Faye, their choices of where to attend college in the U.S. were limited due to weak grades and standardized test scores, so having an aunt living near Hawthorne serendipitously made the decision for them. Ajay received acceptance into universities in Australia and India, but selected Hawthorne as his first choice "because my sister was here. I would be saving a lot of money because of my housing."

Similarly, Susan and Humberto could save not only on housing by staying with family and friends, but also on tuition at North Star by receiving the "living-in guest rate." As Susan explains, "It's better to go where we know somebody here."

Mary also indicated the closeness of Central to where she is living as an important factor in her decision. Mary's husband was studying at the neighboring public university and she had a child to care for. Therefore, the factor she identified as most prominent in the choice of attending a community college was close proximity to her home. She is the only student interviewed at Central who currently lived in the area.

Relevance for Community Colleges

Students acknowledged they were unfamiliar with U.S. geography and turned to online resources like Google Maps to find colleges. When investigating the location of the institution, students indicated they evaluated the location in relation to a large city. Important to note in this case study, Chicago was more relevant than Illinois for the participants. Recognizing this, community colleges should indicate their location relative

to large metropolitan areas in their various marketing materials. The suburban schools in this study included maps showing their location relative to Chicago's two major airports. On the other hand, Central indicated their distance to Chicago and two closer cities St. Louis and Indianapolis. Distances provided on the maps should be listed in kilometers as well as miles as an accommodation to international students.

For international students, knowing family or friends in the vicinity of the community college was an important factor. The international students could stay with relatives and help lessen their cost of living expenses. With the vast majority of community colleges without student dorms, housing options such as a combination of local residents, family and friends can decrease international students' living expenses. North Star helped to strengthen this relationship with local residents through the "live-in guest tuition rate."

Transfer Function

Even though 11 out of 13 participants intended to transfer to a university after graduation from a community college, only five in this study spoke directly about the transfer function as a reason for them attend a community college. The ease of transfer from a community college to a university was identified by Sadiq as the most important factor since community colleges allowed a smoother entry into the U.S. higher education system. As he explained:

From university in my country (Azerbaijan), it is hard to transfer to university here, but if I transfer to community college, it will be next step; it will be like a bridge between university in my country and university in the U.S. So I can study a little bit here and then apply university (in the U.S.).

Sadiq had a particular interest in comparing articulation agreements and examining what universities the international students had transferred to after graduating from City View Community College. He evaluated community colleges based on this information. Community colleges Sadiq researched in the New York City area, “had some universities (to transfer to) but it wasn’t the level of education which I want,” he commented. According to Sadiq, City View had a more impressive list of transfer universities. He went to the extent of contacting the international student office by email to confirm his possible transfer options.

For Sachiko and Johan, the transfer function allowed them to save money. Sachiko had a specific private non-profit university in Chicago which she wanted to attend, but because of the high cost, she needed to find a lower cost option for the first two years before she could transfer. In Sachiko’s opinion, “It’s the only way I can really go to (the school I want).” Johan viewed community college as an affordable way to get a degree, but admits, “that’s why I went here first so I can transfer someplace else.”

For Seung and Faye, the transfer function allowed them to get into four-year schools which they would not be able to do otherwise because of low grades and/or standardized test scores. Seung tells his friends, “not to take the SATs. Just go to a community college and then transfer to where ever you wanted. It’s the easier way.”

Relevance for Community Colleges

Evidence of the transfer function’s influence in the decision making process indicates this function of community college is being recognized by international students. Five students in this study particularly noted how community colleges could be the bridge to

various personal hurdles such as financial constraints relative to attending college in a foreign country, entry into the U.S., adjustment into the U.S. college system and cultural adjustment. It is important to note that 11 of the 13 participants intend to continue their studies at four-year institutions making the transfer function highly relevant to their future plans if not a stated factor influencing their decision.

Community colleges should highlight their transfer function by providing information on articulation agreements they have with four-year colleges and universities. However, even if present on the college's website, articulation agreements are often confusing and do not list all the institutions that are available to the student. On their institution websites, community colleges could list the transfer destinations of their international student graduates. Hawthorne, for example, provides testimonials of recent international student graduates which include information regarding the universities where they transferred.

Community colleges must be wary of how information on transfer institutions is being presented. Unfortunately, there have been documented cases in which community colleges have overstated claims of transfer institutions (Golden, 2002; Krupnick, 2007). International students tend to look for universities they recognize among the transfer institutions. The contemporary practice of university rankings world-wide has elevated profiles of a number of U.S. institutions (Labi, 2008b). Community colleges need to be aware of these global rankings and how it could impact the perception of their articulation agreements and listing of their transfer institutions.

Easier Entry Requirements

Faye, Seung, and Wu identified the easier entry requirements of a community college as compared to a university as a factor which influenced their choice. For Faye, this was the most important aspect of selecting a U.S. community college after believing her high school grades to be unacceptable for admission to a four-year university in her native Hong Kong, Singapore, or the United States. She indicated that her aunt described this as an opportunity for Faye to “start over again,” another unique aspect of community colleges. Therefore, there is the recognition that for some local students as well as international students, community colleges may be their only option. In places like Hong Kong, where university enrollment is limited to a select group of students, community colleges provide an option to continue, change or revive career pursuits.

The standardize test requirements of U.S. universities deterred Wu and Seung from applying. They had both gone to high school in North America, but they did not take the SAT or ACT tests. Without these standardized college placement tests, they would not be admitted into the vast majority of U.S. universities, but they could enroll in community colleges since these tests were not required. Wu changed his mind from looking at four-year universities to exclusively looking at community colleges because of this requirement. As Seung saw it, “If you go to a community college, you won’t have to take the SATs which saves time for me.”

Relevance for Community Colleges

As the growth of the international student market continues, the number of these potential students who have weak or low grades and/or standardized test scores is likely

to increase. Because community colleges have an open-door admission policy, international students could forego taking any standardized testing for admission. Doku's 2007 study on community college international students also identified "ease of admission" as a factor which influenced their college choice. Community colleges are in a unique position to address this population of international students by promoting their ease of admission and accessibility.

Community colleges should not make the assumption that international students drawn to them will need ESL services. Among the three students who noted the ease of admission factor, only one needed to take an ESL class. Students may be test adverse or find the time and money to take standardized tests not worthwhile. With international students knowing the option of community colleges, many may be more willing to bypass taking the SAT, ACT, or TOEFL and go directly to community colleges.

Best Place to Develop English Skills

Some of the participants were specifically told to attend community colleges because of their limited English proficiency. Sadiq recalls being told this advice from the U.S.-Azerbaijan Education Center in Baku.

It is very hard to study in English and compete with American students because English is their first language. If you start at a community college where there are a lot of international students, I can take developmental course like ILP (Intensive Language Program) it will be easier for me to improve my English and then transfer.

Karen had gone to an educational agency in her native Vietnam, where she was told much the same. "Most of the students that don't have English proficiency usually always

start with community colleges first. If the students study really good, they will go to the university and start to study.” Although Karen would like to go to a university, she believes she has no choice but a community college because of her English skills.

Gloria specifically wanted a school in which she would be forced to improve her English. She had requested from her private educational agency a school “without many Koreans.” She selected Central because she thought it would be a good location to learn English although she did not know what a community college was at the time.

Relevance for Community Colleges

Characteristics of community colleges such as smaller class sizes, more student-centered, and more accepting of students with less English proficiency contribute to the perception of community colleges being an ideal environment to develop English skills. Community colleges should emphasize these positive elements in their marketing materials to international students. One example is to highlight faculty at the community college, where students are likely to have greater access. Hawthorne provides four faculty profiles on their website and in their marketing material which convey the caliber of experience and expertise of the faculty. In addition, students considering community college because it offers the opportunity to develop their English skills will want to know about the ESL program and related services such as language tutoring or a conversation café to practice spoken English. ESL professionals therefore can play an important role in developing this portion of the marketing message for the community college.

Less Predominated Factors Given

Additional factors are identified by the study's participants as influencing their decision to attend a community college. Although these factors are not as prevalent in the study, they contribute to understanding the complex nature of the decision making process for the international students.

Influenced by word of mouth

Most international students are unable to visit a U.S. community college campus before deciding to apply. Instead, they must rely on information from others. One of the a priori themes identified from the literature was the importance of word of mouth recommendations (Chen & Zimitat 2006; Doku, 2007; Gray, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar 2002; Pimpa, 2002). However, only one student said her decision to attend a specific community college was made based on a recommendation. Karen stated her reasons for attending Hawthorne Community College was, "First, good location. Second, it is a good college. That's what people told me before I came here." It is important to note that Hawthorne Community College was not exclusively Karen's choice. She had conducted her own research on studying in other countries and other places in the U.S., but she commented, "I always have to choose a school near relatives so I really don't have a choice." Even though other study participants were given recommendations by word of mouth, they determined their preference, and then sought out information as needed. In this sense the other participants felt they were making the decision to come to the school and not having the decision imposed on them. The participants' preferences like lower

tuition, location, and ease of admissions become the factors for them not a second-hand personal recommendation.

First hand knowledge

Four students had visited the community college campus prior to attending, but only two, Humberto and Mary, cite the results of their visit as a prominent factor for their decision. Mary liked the facilities and resources she saw particularly for her pursuit of a career in nursing at Central, while Humberto liked the environment at North Star. He had been to other schools for a visit so he had a measure of comparison, which favored North Star.

Nine out of the 13 participants made their decision on the school without a personal visit. All three participants at Hawthorne had relatives in the area who could provide them with first hand accounts. The six students without any first hand experience or sources had to rely on the information provided by educational agency with which they were working in their home country.

Small class size

Early reports on international students at community college (Ewing, 1992) showed small class size to be a factor although later studies had not identified it (Doku, 2007; Zeszotarski, 2003). Two students in this study pointed out that small class size was a reason for selecting their community college. Seung and Johan found this fact contained in the marketing materials they received from the community colleges. Class size was not mentioned by the other participants. It is unclear from the interviews if other students

were unaware of this characteristic of community colleges or it simply was not significant enough of a factor for them.

Two-year programs

Two students specifically liked the community college focus on two-year programs. Mary liked that she could in two years be a registered nurse (RN) at the community college and then go on to a university for a bachelor's degree in nursing (BSN). In Yutaka's case, his father gave him two years to complete his studies abroad and get a degree. By attending a community college, Yutaka could accomplish this. As Yutaka posited, "City View has two-year program associate degree and that was my big reason." It is important for community colleges to recognize that the two year associate's degree is a draw for some international students. For this study, the majority (ten of the 13 participants) wanted to complete an associate's degree as part of their stay at the community college.

Housing program

At the present time, Illinois law prohibits community colleges from having dormitories on campus. To circumvent this law, some colleges make arrangements with local area apartment complexes and home rentals to house international students. City View has this arrangement, but also offers a host family program. Two students taking part in City View's host family housing program mentioned this as a factor for selecting their community college. As Sachiko noted, "it is the only community college with a host program, close to Chicago." Johan commented, "I do want to live in a dorm, but to

live with an American family to get experience and all the cultural benefits. It is a one chance in a lifetime.” The uniqueness of this program at City View made it stand out for these students.

Access to U.S. students

Yutaka, whose focus is to learn and experience American culture, thought he would have a greater opportunity to do so at a community college. “I thought I could make friends with American students and get in classes with them.” However, after attending classes, he felt he was treated like a “visitor” by the American students because his foreign sounding pronunciation.

Research Question #2 Prior to making their decision, what information and knowledge regarding community colleges in the U.S. and the position of community colleges in the U.S. higher education system do international students possess?

Previous research on how much information international students have before they make their decision showed the knowledge to be limited notably at the undergraduate level (Ahmad, 2006; Doku, 2007). Without the benefit of comparable community colleges in their home countries, international students have much to understand regarding community colleges and their role within the U.S. higher education system. The degree of knowledge about community colleges held by the participants prior to their decision to attend a community college varied considerably. Not surprisingly, the characteristics of community colleges they knew correlated directly with their reasons for selecting a community college.

Prior Knowledge and Information

Faye's aunt had studied abroad in Australia, but she had not attended Hawthorne. Yet she recommended it to Faye. As Faye recalls her aunt told her,

It is big institution that provides you with opportunities for you to study because the requirements aren't high, it's easy to get into and after studying for 45 credit hours you can transfer to another institution and possibly they won't look at your high school transcript.

Faye's aunt provided her with two of her three decision making factors for going to Hawthorne – ease of admission and the transfer function with the third factor being the location to her aunt's house. Although she knew these features of community college, she recognized that her knowledge was limited. "I knew it gives associate degrees but I wasn't well informed. I just came here. I did research later."

Karen was told by her aunt that Hawthorne was "near our house and it is a good college." The private educational agency gave Karen additional information regarding the features of community colleges such as not requiring international students to take the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) exam, facilitating the development of her English proficiency, and lastly the ease of transferring to university.

Some of the participants acknowledged they did not really understand the position of community colleges in the higher education system until they experienced it first hand. According to Susan, "I had to be in this school (North Star) and pass at least one semester even for me to realize what is a community college. It took me personal experience." She learned of North Star from her husband's friend, who told her it was a good school with a very reasonable fee (tuition) for international students. Yutaka and Gloria did not

learn about the characteristics of community college until they arrived on the campus. To Gloria, it was “a cheaper college.” Like Gloria and Susan, Yutaka already had a degree in his home country and was ambivalent about the position community colleges hold in the U.S. higher education system. He admitted that he did not investigate the meaning of community college except to note in his dictionary, “University and college have the same meaning.”

On the opposite extreme, Ajay was well-informed thanks to two sisters who previously attended Hawthorne. He remembers being told about the accessibility of the faculty and how this contrasted with the information he received from his friends at U. S. universities.

Humberto was equally well informed through a campus visit. It was from this visit where he learned about the tuition and fee structure, the transfer function, and the open-door admission policy of the community college. One important fact he gathered from his visit was he would not need to take the TOEFL exam. Humberto stated, “That’s one reason why I came here (North Star). I was kind of afraid about passing the TOEFL test.”

Mary learned from her on-campus visit that community colleges were less expensive, smaller, and she could get “the basics of whatever I need before going to university.” Both Mary and Susan’s husbands were attending universities, so they had an additional point of reference when learning about community colleges. Mary described community colleges as “a mini-university.”

Despite being in two different countries, Sachiko and Johan’s experiences in Japan and Sweden respectively were similar. Both were told community colleges were

cheaper than universities and you can transfer to a university later. Sachiko was told, “You get the same kind of class or credit at a cheaper price and you can just transfer afterwards.” Johan had asked why it is cheaper and was told, “It is sponsored by the government or something that is why it is cheaper than a private school.” Both cited price and the transfer function as factors for deciding on their community college.

Wu remembers being told community colleges were less expensive and they did not require ACTs or SATs, two factors he would mention in selecting Central. When he was attending high school in Nebraska, Wu recalls, “Sophomore year I wanted a four-year college. After that I decided to go to a two-year college.” He attributes make this change to community colleges to avoid taking standardized tests and save some money on tuition.

In Sadiq’s case, he was told, “a community college is lower than a university so it will be easier for us to improve English and see what is going on here.” He appreciated the fact that in the U.S. he could select his classes instead of being told what he had to take in his country. In addition, he liked the transfer function and the fact that there were other international students attending the community college.

The responses shared by the participants indicate that what ever the amount of information they had about community colleges, it was sufficient for them to make their decision. Students looking to transfer to four year programs were more informed on the role of community colleges in the U.S. education system than those students who were not.

Relevance for Community Colleges

It is apparent community college officials will need to focus their marketing message based on the education pursuits of the international students. With a myriad of choices available to international students, how community colleges are perceived and what they uniquely offer students is vital. A succinct and targeted message from the community colleges to international students is necessary and can be supported by federal, state, local agencies as well as national organizations such as the American Association of Community College (AACC).

Research Question #3 *What are the informational sources and in what ways are these sources utilized to assist international students in making their decision to attend a U.S. community college in Illinois?*

It is apparent study participants had one or two main sources which provided the valuable information regarding community colleges on which to make their decisions. While the sources of information the participants tended to vary, family and friend involvement and private educational agencies were the most frequently cited (see Table 24).

Table 24. Sources of Information on Community Colleges

Name	Used educational agencies	Family/friend involvement in process	How or from whom they first learned about U.S. community colleges	Other resources
Mary		Yes	Visited a community college	
Seung	Yes	Yes	Presentation in South Korea by CC Director	Website
Wu	Yes	Yes	U.S. high school teacher	Website
Gloria	Yes		After attending a community college	
Susan		Yes	Her brother-in-law	
Humberto		Yes	His cousin	
Yutaka	Yes	Yes	After attending a community college	School catalog
Sadiq		Yes	U.S.-Azerbaijan Education Center	Website & e-mails
Sachiko	Yes	Yes	Private educational agency	
Johan	Yes	Yes	Private educational agency	Website & school brochure
Karen	Yes	Yes	Private educational agency & aunt	
Faye		Yes	Aunt	
Ajay		Yes	His two older sisters	

Family and Friend Involvement

The study found if international students had family or friends residing in the area of a community college, they obtained from them all of their information regarding the specific institution or community colleges in general. Unfortunately, the participant's family and friends near the community colleges did not always know the all of the benefits and exactly what the community college could offer. However, they knew it was an institution where an international student could study. This simple general information provided by family and friends did lead the participants to investigate that specific community college including campus visits in some cases.

For the participants enrolled at Hawthorne Community College, their family members were central if not exclusive sources of information. Ajay's two sisters previously attended Hawthorne. His eldest sister learned about Hawthorne when she was living with her husband in the U.S. She wanted to make a career change and so enrolled at Hawthorne. She had encouraged Ajay's other sister to come as an F-1 student. The second sister received her associate's degree at Hawthorne and went on to a large public research university in a neighboring state. For Ajay, the information he received from his two sisters' experience was not limited to information about the U.S. education system, but also about studying abroad in general. When asked if he looked at any other resources for community college information such as the internet, Ajay replied, "I didn't look at anything." Faye's aunt recommended Hawthorne to Faye although her aunt never attended the college and only lived nearby. Karen learned about U.S. community colleges first from a private educational agency in Ho Chi Minh City, but it was her aunt who informed the agency and Karen about Hawthorne. Like Faye's aunt, Karen's aunt

only knew of the college having driven past it. Nevertheless, Karen felt stronger about her aunt's opinion than the agency as she describes, "I trusted my aunt. She lives there, so she'll know which one is good." Karen's inclination to rely more on her relative with local knowledge over an agency with global knowledge on studying abroad is not uncommon. Zeszotarski (2003) found this to be true in her research with international students at Santa Monica Community College.

At North Star Community College, both Susan and Humberto learned about community colleges through family and friends in the area of the college. Susan had originally learned about community colleges from her brother-in-law. He had suggested this educational option after she attended a private college in Texas for one semester and paid \$1500 per month in tuition and fees. She then learned of North Star from her husband's friend, who now provides her a place to stay while she is enrolled. Humberto first learned about North Star from his cousin living in the area. He would gain greater insight about community colleges from visiting North Star when he was still attending high school in the area. Humberto said his on-site campus visit "gave me an idea of community college."

Relevance for Community Colleges

It is vital community colleges continuously promote their benefits and offerings to area residents in a variety of ways. This openness and sharing of information provides those living in the district, such as the international student's family and friends, frequent and easy opportunities to learn more about the college. In turn, this access to correct and

vital information regarding a specific community college could lead to a decision by potential international students to apply and attend.

Private Educational Agents

Unlike North Star and Hawthorne, City View Community College and Central Community College saw a high number of international students using private educational agencies for a variety of reasons. Karen was the only participant from Hawthorne to use a private educational agent and then it was in conjunction with information she obtained from her aunt. Through the agency, Karen first became familiar with community colleges. Surprisingly, although seven participants used private educational agents, only three were first informed about community colleges from the agencies.

Both Sachiko and Johan initially acquired information about community colleges through their private educational agents. They were specifically provided with City View Community College information as an option to continue their higher education in the U.S. when the first choices given to them were too expensive. When asked if Sachiko did any additional research, she said no and admitted, “I just wanted to get information and I was too lazy to research it by myself.” Johan did go online to look at the community college for some information, but felt, “it would be too complicated to search for anything else because they (the agency) help me so much with the visa, application and other stuff.”

Two of the participants who utilized an educational agency possessed information on community colleges before enlisting the agency’s services. Wu learned about

community colleges when he was a high school student in Nebraska, so by the time he contacted a private educational agency, he was only asking for help in finding a specific community college to attend. Seung was informed about community college through a presentation given by Central Community College's International Student Director, which his parents attended in his home of Pusan, South Korea. The presentation done in conjunction with a Pusan-based agency compelled him to contract with a private educational agency.

Private educational agencies did not explain what a community college was to Yutaka or Gloria. In fact, neither student understood what community colleges were until they were enrolled at their institution. Both were provided information about a specific community college as an option to their higher education experience in the U.S. and selected it largely for the cost in Gloria's case or variety of factors with cost among them for Yutaka. When asked if she did any additional research, Gloria replied, "no, I trusted the agency." Yutaka and Gloria were the only two participants not interested in completing a bachelor's degree and did not have long term plans to be in the United States. This suggests students looking to study short term are less interested in the position of community colleges in the U.S. higher education and more interested in the benefits it offers international students such as low cost, opportunities to develop English skills, and location.

Relevance for Community Colleges

The increasing complexity of studying in the U.S. and the increasing number of options throughout the world available to international students make private educational

agencies an indispensable tool. Although much of the information needed by these students was available on the community college websites, participants who selected private educational agents relied on these agencies to do this work for them. The desire for a “global identity” coupled with the myriad of study abroad destinations throughout the world has led to the emergence of the private educational agency industry. In essence, this new industry controls all of the crucial information as well as the ability to facilitate procurement of required documents for access to the U.S. specifically for international students wanting to study abroad. The monopoly this industry holds filters the wealth of information relevant to international students presenting to them only selected details which they use to make their decision. Both Central and City View have agreements with private educational agencies, providing them with pertinent information and thus having a highly visible international presence. Judicious use of private educational agencies throughout the globe expands the number of international students community colleges can reach and draw to their institution.

Other Sources

Seung learned of community colleges when his parents attended a presentation given by the International Student Director at Central Community College in South Korea. As Seung explains, “If (Central’s International Student Director) didn’t come to Korea, I don’t know what I would be doing right now.” He had recently returned to South Korea after graduating from high school in Nova Scotia. Even though Canada has a community college system, Seung said he had never heard of community colleges until the visit by Central’s International Student Director. Seung had gone to another

educational agency for high school exchanges and believes his parents would have not gone to the college agency if it were not for the presentation. Seung worked with the college agency, which had an agreement with Central, to expedite the application process for him to attend a U.S. community college. Because of the relationship between Central and the private educational agency, Seung felt secure with going to Central. “The guy that owns the company is a good guy and had all the information about the college.”

Wu, who also worked through a private educational agency and graduated from a North American high school, learned about community college from his high school teacher in Nebraska. When he went to his private educational agent in Hong Kong, he requested two-year colleges and the agency recommended three community colleges, one of which was Central. Wu is uncertain how the agent was familiar with any of the community colleges.

Of the three students who studied at U.S. high schools, only Sachiko did not know about community colleges. Sachiko, however, spent only one year in the U.S. attending a high school in an exchange program and did not graduate like Humberto and Wu.

Mary was already in the United States when she learned about community colleges. She visited a community college, which was not far from her apartment where she was staying with her husband who was an international student studying at a local university. When her husband transferred to a more rural university, she was introduced to Central through one of her husband’s classmates who was also originally from Africa.

In Sadiq’s case, he used a US government resource, the US-Azerbaijan Education Center in Baku, for information on studying abroad in the U.S. It was through this government agency where he learned about community colleges and focused his search

on them. Sadiq stated, “Everybody that wants to study in the U.S. goes there and asks for advice, so did I. And they advise me about community colleges.” Sadiq is the only participant in this study who used a government resource for information.

Relevance for Community Colleges

With an increasing number of students investigating opportunities to study abroad before college, this study found high schools are a potential source for international students. Involvement in high school outreach like North Star employs provides community colleges with a low cost, highly personal form of recruitment. While many community colleges engage in recruiting events with area high schools, more attention should be given to the international students currently enrolled in these high schools.

Although international presentations can be costly for community colleges, expenses could easily be recouped by successfully recruiting just one or two students. Personal contact with the potential international students assists in making these students feel more comfortable and can increase the likelihood of the student attending a specific institution. Another avenue to greater visibility for community colleges internationally is participation in international recruitment consortiums or greater involvement with the government organized EducationUSA centers.

Website and Other Secondary Information Sources

Study participants who do not have friends or family in the area of the community college they now attend were more likely to use sources of information such as the college website, brochures or catalogs. The reasons for looking on the schools’ website

varied. Sadiq was interested in articulation agreements and transfer universities, which was a significant factor in his decision. Seung wanted to become acquainted with international student activities, the appearance of the college in general, and if there were other Koreans attending. Wu used the website to help make his final decision as to what community college he would attend. According to Wu, “It (Central) just looked better than the other one.”

None of the participants mentioned going to the Study Illinois website or other community college related sites like the AACC. The information sought out by the participants was institution specific only.

Relevance for Community Colleges

The recruitment benefits of a current, vibrant easy-access Website can not be underrated. The Website with colorful pictures of the college, international student activities and uncomplicated list of the benefits reaped from attending the college is a crucial component in international as well as local student recruitment. Creatively sharing the experiences of other international students, such as blogs or social networking style sites, and the use of digital media, such as streaming video or Podcasts, can only improve the chances of increasing the numbers of international students applying and attending community colleges.

Research Question #4 *Do the factors stated by international students at a suburban community college differ from those attending a rural community college?*

Suburban and Rural Comparative Factors

Findings of the study indicate the factors international students used to make their decision were similar whether they attended a suburban or rural community college. However, there is greater consistency in the factors given by the rural students compared to the suburban counterparts. All six participants attending rural community college stated the lower cost of tuition to be a significant factor in their decision. Conversely, for those attending a suburban community college, the cost of tuition was only a significant factor for four out of the seven participants. These findings suggest international students coming to rural community colleges place a stronger emphasis on financial matters, in particular the cost of tuition.

A higher percentage of the participants at rural community colleges indicated they wanted to stay in the United States compared to their counterparts attending suburban community colleges. Only one student from the suburban community colleges plans on staying in the U.S. with two others considering it as an option. On the other hand, four of the six participants from the rural colleges envision their experience in the U.S. to extend beyond their community college studies. Interestingly, two of the rural participants intend to transfer to a university before completion of their associate's degree. All the suburban participants are committed to graduating with an associate degree.

Decision factors unique to the rural locations did not emerge from the research findings. Study participants did not mention safety as being a consideration for selecting

a rural location as a post 9-11 study indicated (Jensen-Kliger, 2005). In fact, Yutaka, who has a degree in agriculture from Japan, had noted he had considered only big cities “because big cities are safer than the countryside.”

It is assumed the native born U.S. students understand the concept of rural versus suburban when selecting a community college location they wish to attend. Edgeworth and Eiseman (2007) found in their research in Australia that international students were also aware of the rural location of the school they selected. This is also true in this study in which all of the participants attending a rural community college understood the location was rural before they came. Gloria, who did not know what a community college was until she arrived, said she knew Central was in a rural location before she made her decision but it was not a factor relating to her decision. According to Gloria, “Actually I didn’t think about the location before I came here.” Edgeworth and Eiseman (2007) conclude that most international students come from large urban areas, so there is an additional period of adjustment for them when they attend a rural college. Susan commented on this from her experience, “It took me a year to like (the town where North Star Community College is located). I come from the capitol city, Kuala Lumpur, and coming to a little town, God bless me. I don’t know how I made it.” Yet other participants like Wu and Seung felt the transition to a rural setting is not difficult since they had experienced living in rural parts of North America, Nebraska and Nova Scotia respectively, during their high school experience.

The study participants at the suburban school City View tend to be the most surprised by their school’s location. Part of this surprise was directly related to their perception of what a suburban location would be in proximity to Chicago. Johan

commented he was surprised City View was “in the middle of nowhere as it is now.”

Yutaka did not expect he would need a car if he was in the suburbs. He expected public transportation to be more accessible in the suburbs of Chicago. Sadiq did not expect the college to be as far from downtown “because the universities and schools in my country are downtown, so I thought it would be the same here.”

Relevance for Community Colleges

Whereas rural based community colleges may be intrinsically aware of how different their location can be for international students, this study shows that suburban community college should not overlook this aspect as well in working with international students. For suburban colleges, a variety of maps and graphic renderings of the community college’s location in relation to metropolitan areas need to be easily available on the college website and in all marketing materials. Even inclusion of bus and train routes and price would be helpful to international students unfamiliar with the area. In addition, personal adjustments by international students should be expected in both settings. Not only are they in a new country and cultural environment, but they are thousands of miles away from home and in many cases the immediate support of any close family or friends. Community college personnel must recognize this potential isolation of their international students by making a commitment to have programs and helpful experiences in place for their comfort and safety.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

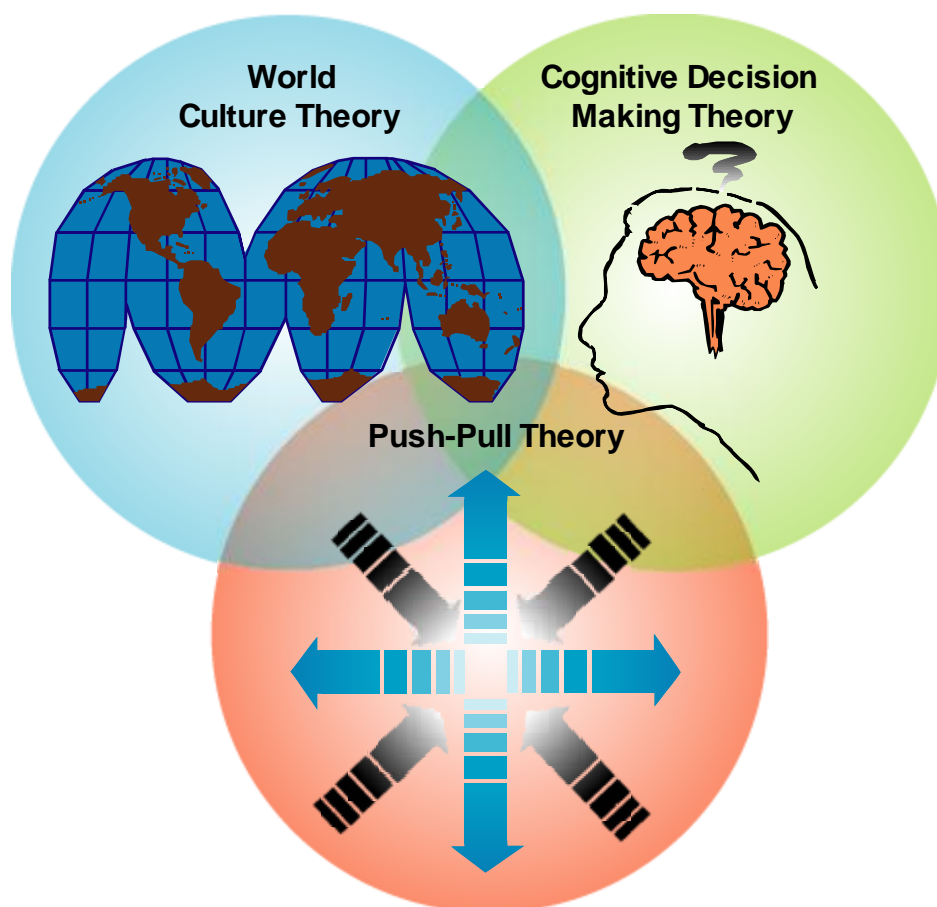
One of the greatest areas of international student growth in the United States is in the community college system. In turn, community colleges are increasing their focus on international student recruitment efforts. The creation of state-wide consortia partnered with the U.S. Department of Commerce such as *Study Illinois*, are just one example of this growing trend. Little is known regarding what factors contribute to an international student's decision to attend a community college. The few current studies on international students attending community colleges involve schools situated in urban settings. However, many of the nation's community colleges which are experiencing growth in international enrollees reside in rural settings. This study is the first involving international students attending rural community colleges.

Summary of the Chapters

The introduction in the first chapter provides an overview of the study and discusses how the forces of globalization have created a knowledge driven economy with higher education as a valued commodity. The impact of globalization and the individual's need of the global perspective or identity have contributed to a growth in the U.S. international student market. Competition for these international students has expanded as countries, states, and institutions look to enhance their profile in the education marketplace as well as to add to their fiscal bottom-line. From this discussion, this study draws its attention to and its emphasis on the rising international student enrollments at community colleges.

Chapter two provides a review of literature on the subject of community colleges and their involvement with international students. The review notes a scarcity of research on the subject of identified factors which contribute to international students' decisions to attend community colleges. The value of a theoretical framework which incorporates related, but distinctive disciplines is presented as the desired eclectic approach in answering the research purpose. The study draws its theoretical framework from world culture theory, push-pull theory, and cognitive-design making theory.

Figure 1. Interrelationship of theories employed in this study.



The framework addresses both external and internal factors in the decision-making process and perspectives both global and individual. From this framework both the

process and influences can be explored and thereby enrich the depth of understanding gleaned from the data.

Chapter three describes the study's design as that of an exploratory qualitative case study situated in the interpretive paradigm in which 13 international students at four community colleges, two suburban and two rural, in Illinois were interviewed. Also discussed is the process by which participants and their institutions were selected as well as the limitations of the study.

Chapter four explains how data was collected and analyzed. The use of the in-person interview as described in this chapter provides rich, thick data for analyzing. A framework was utilized to maintain the audit trail and transparency of the study. A priori and emerging themes were employed to facilitate in the coding and analysis of the data gathered from the interviews and field notes.

In chapter five, the data gathered from the interviews and demographic survey is presented. Thematic tables are used to illustrate the commonalities and differences of the data collected. Full transcripts were not included in order to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the participant and institution.

Chapter six explores the findings related to the research purpose and its driving questions. The findings of the study shared here identified common factors which were influential in the students' decision making process.

In this chapter, the seventh and final one, conclusions are drawn from the data as they relate to the research questions. To provide an enhanced understanding of the findings, a discussion of the theoretical framework's relevance to the data is presented. From the

data, a model of the international student's decision making process was constructed. Recommendations for future research are also included in this chapter.

Overview of Research Questions' Findings

In general, the research finds community colleges have a prominent role in influencing the students' ultimate decision on which college to attend. Notably, the findings indicate that marketing and recruitment efforts of community colleges have the greatest impact at strategic points in the international students' decision making process.

The purpose of this study is to identify what factors lead international students to decide to attend Illinois community colleges. Four research questions were derived to address the study's purpose. An overview of findings illuminates the realities of study participants.

Research Question # 1 *What factors weigh most predominantly in the students' decisions to attend a community college?*

The study's findings designate cost and location to be the two most predominant factors international students take into account when deciding to attend a U.S. community college. Like most U.S. students investigating where to attend college, it was not surprising that cost is a crucial factor in the decision of the study's participants. These international students sought the "best value" for their higher education needs located in an international destination. They found this "value" in U.S. community colleges. However, for these international students, cost incorporated an unforeseen tangential second component. The study found these students felt attending a community college

would give them access to the U.S. higher education system while in a encouraging, non-competitive setting. Further, these international students felt they could acclimate themselves to the United States higher education system in a community college, while saving on costs.

Location was the second predominant factor the study participants took into account when deciding to attend a U.S. community college. The findings show location is also a multi-dimensional factor and is not a simple factor or component in a strictly linear decision-making process. These students identified the location of their community college in relation to major cities rather than U.S. states or regions. In addition, the location of the community college also had a link to cost. Participants perceived the community college's location as a cost savings when it was strategically accessible to a large metropolitan area or close to relatives or friends who could provide accommodations. The participants acknowledged they were aware of the geographic location of their community college prior to their decision. This was true even in cases in which the participants had never lived in a rural or suburban location respectively. While the participants did not specify the setting of the community college as a factor, the lower cost of living and expenses associated with suburban and rural settings were cited.

Research Question #2 Prior to making their decision, what information and knowledge regarding community colleges in the U.S. and the position of community colleges in the U.S. higher education system do international students possess?

The study found the amount of information and knowledge regarding community colleges the international students possessed varied based on their long-term educational

goals. Participants who were intending to later transfer to a U.S. university after graduating from a community college, generally tended to be more informed and knowledgeable about community colleges than those participants who were not. The findings seem to indicate the more specific information provided via a variety of venues assisted potential international students to make their decision to attend a community college.

The study also found community colleges were often not the first choice of the participants when they began their initial search for a post-secondary educational experience in the United States. Unlike their American counterparts with greater familiarity with community colleges, international students discovered community colleges only through their decision making process. Most significantly, international students in this study upon learning more about community colleges in relation to four year institutions did see the unique characteristics of community colleges as factors influencing their decision. These factors identified by the participants included the transfer function, open-door admission, and a favorable environment to develop English.

Research Question #3 What are the informational sources and in what ways are these sources utilized to assist international students in making their decision to attend a U.S. community college in Illinois?

Study participants frequently relied on one of two informational sources regarding community colleges: personal sources located in the vicinity of the community college or private educational agencies contracted to research study abroad options. Family or friends residing in the community college district were almost the exclusive source of

information for study participants about community colleges prior to the participants' decision. Even though information provided by family and friends could be inaccurate or unreliable, it was not usurped by other sources.

In cases where no family or friends in the U.S. existed, study participants employed private educational agencies for information. For the participants who utilized private educational agents, information gathering and fact-finding on studying abroad and institutions of higher education were the domain of the agencies. The idea of attending U. S. community colleges was offered by these agencies as an option only if there was a question about the student meeting eligibility requirements for acceptance into four year institutions or if the participants found four-year university options as too expensive.

In spite of increasing collaborative efforts by the federal government and community colleges, only one participant relied on a U.S. State Department resource center in his home country. No study participant specifically identified *Study Illinois* or any other consortium resource as having a role in assisting them with making their decision to attend a community college.

Overall, the participants appeared to be more inclined to make decisions based on the information provided to them by their local sources or agencies than to actively seek out information on their own. Only four of the thirteen participants discussed visiting their community college's website usually during the end of the decision making process to reassure their decision or solidify it. Participants indicated their approach or lack of information gathering was a result of being overwhelmed by the sheer volumes of available information.

Research Question #4 *Do the factors stated by international students at a suburban community college differ from those attending a rural community college?*

The findings showed very little difference between the factors leading to a decision identified by study participants attending suburban community colleges and those at rural community colleges. However, the factor of cost was more prevalent among the six participants attending rural community colleges. Furthermore, the participants at rural community colleges intended to stay in the United States and seek employment after their studies with greater frequency than their suburban counterparts.

Discussion of Utilization of the Theoretical Framework

This research study incorporated a unique theoretical framework by which to examine the international student decision making process and the factors contributing to a final decision. No one theory on its own could address the complexity of the research question posed in this study. However, the amalgamation of push-pull theory, world culture theory, and cognitive decision making theory allowed for the researcher to view the driving questions from different theoretical lenses lending greater understanding to the findings.

The discussion which follows examines the application of the theoretical framework in assessing the research findings. Transparency of this process provides for a more encompassing interpretation of the findings.

World Culture Theory

In keeping with Michael Singh's (2005) call for incorporating contemporary theories of cultural globalization in understanding internationalization in higher education, world culture theory serves as the foundational theory for the study. Utilization of the world culture theory offers a unique platform in which to situate the decision making process and the understanding of how global influences contribute to international student's decision to attend community colleges. The pervasiveness of globalization touched all the international students participating in the study to varying degrees.

First and foremost, the driving force for the study participants was their personal specific goal to have an international post-secondary educational experience to develop a "global identity". The study found the students' drive for attainment of this personal goal, development of a global identity, occurred prior to their decision to study internationally, as well as prior to their decision to attend U. S. community colleges. Overall, the students' ability to adapt to different cultures, understand the basics of a globalized world, and bring the global influences into their own personal perspectives are underscored in their decision to attend a community college in Illinois.

Push-Pull Theory

Push-pull theory offered a highly utilitarian theory pertinent to understanding the more delicate intricacies of the basic decision making processes undertaken by the study participants. The central idea of the theory as applied in this research is one of equilibrium or integrative balance where forces both from the home country and the

destination country underpin the decision making process. Additionally, the incorporation of this theory compliments world culture theory's ability to connect the individual to the larger world context and cognitive decision making theory's employment of the different information sources contributing to a decision.

The utilization of the push-pull theory illuminated the contributing factors in the decision-making process. In particular, the delicate, but forceful pull and push forces had a role in the decision to study abroad (development of the person's global identity) and selection of the destination country. In most cases, the pull of studying abroad had taken root early toward the end of their primary level education. Unexpectedly, the study found the push forces were minimal or even non-existent because the participants envisioned studying abroad not as an alternative, but rather a necessity to participating in a globalized age.

The study also identified how international students make a determination regarding a host country before applying to any college. The United States emerged as the participants' destination host country due to certain overwhelming factors or "pulls." The use of the English language, quality of U.S. education, the value of a U.S. degree in the global marketplace, and exposure to American culture were identified as the most widely influential secondary decision making factors for the participants. Awareness of the global benefits of a degree obtained in the United States bodes favorably for U.S. community colleges as well as other U.S. post-secondary education institutions as long as the U.S. maintains its educational world dominance. Once the students determine their destination country, it is at this time the decisions on the type of institution and college are pursued and carefully weighed.

Cognitive Decision Making Theory

Cognitive decision making theory presented a theoretical understanding of the international students' decision making process. The findings of this research convey a process which is recursive and incremental. In cognitive decision making, the decision maker enlists three possible sources of inputs in determining the outcome: preference (what one feels), knowledge (what one knows), and information (what one must learn).

Preference

The influence of preference in the cognitive decision making process for the international students was prominent. To begin with, the students' preference initiated the decision to study abroad. Essentially, the participants' desire to study abroad was a highly motivating personal preference. The students displayed a strong preference to develop a global identity which was only attainable by pursuing higher education internationally. The selection of their study abroad destination drew from their favorable preference toward the United States. The participants' preference for the U.S. was definitely supported by the world reputation of the U.S. educational system and global recognition of U.S. credentials.

Knowledge

Most of the students had knowledge of study abroad from their own experience or previous knowledge gained from others whose opinions they valued. Therefore, they all had some type of familiarity with the expectations of studying abroad. The study found students' knowledge about the host country was particularly critical in assisting the

participants with their section. Because of the United States' global predominance from its widespread cultural, political, and economic influence, all the participants had a general preexisting knowledge about the country. This knowledge of the U.S.'s quality of higher education was so significant that it was the primary factor in their decision as to where to study abroad. However, the study findings point to the fact that once the host country decision was made, they knew relatively little about the different types of U. S. higher education institutions. Therefore, it is at this important third step in the decision making process, the decision on the type of U.S. institution to attend, that the study recognizes the international students had no existing knowledge from which to draw.

Information

While the participants had knowledge about studying abroad as well as a general understanding of the United States to draw from, their information of the U.S. educational system was virtually none when it came to community colleges. The study found at this third step in their decision making process, selection of the type of institution, that the participants turned to external sources of information most frequently family and friends or private educational agencies.

For the study participants, this third step in the decision making process was noted to be more complicated than expected. The information gathered by the participants was not limited to general information regarding four year universities and community colleges. They also collected information on specific community colleges investigating the respective living expenses/ housing arrangements, social activities and student services, transfer institutions and articulation agreements, and facts about the surrounding

physical location of the community colleges and the districts. Most importantly, it is at this point in the international student's decision process where international students make their first contact with the community college and thus the ultimate decision to attend.

Conclusion

Decisions are undoubtedly complex and the process is undisputedly iterative. Yet, this study's findings point to an evident linear thread embedded in the decision to attend a community college for international students. The linear decision thread which emerged from the findings is as follows:

1. The process begins with the international students' general knowledge about studying abroad and a preference to develop a global identity.
2. For a variety of reasons, the international students have a preference for studying aboard in the United States.
3. International students utilize a variety of data sources, predominately family, friends, and educational agencies, to gather information about different types of U.S. higher education institutions.
4. From this variety of data sources and their own personal preferences, the students select their institution.

The study findings revealed key steps in information gathering for international students. The fourth and final decision step is shown to be the most conducive to intervention and precise target marketing for community colleges and supporting organizations to contribute to the individual student's decision.

What is equally significant is that the findings infer international students have a deliberate inquiry process when investigating the prospect of attending community colleges. These international students are being deliberately selective with their application process. Therefore, by the time a community college receives an international student application, most likely the students have already eliminated all other institutions from the selection process and are committed to learning and all that it entails at the community college.

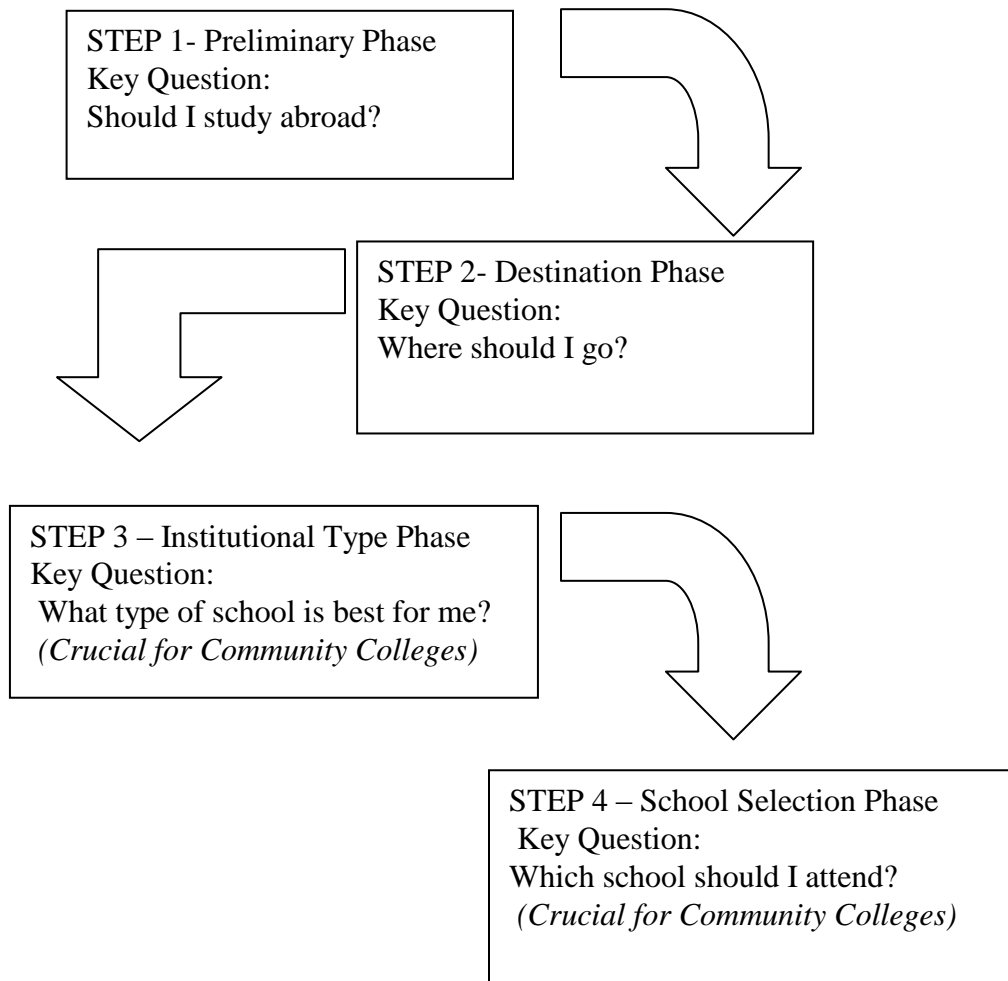
Bohman International Student Community College Decision Model

The Bohman International Student Community College Decision Model (Figure 6) was developed from the analysis of the insights obtained from this research. The process international students undertake when deciding to attend a U.S. community college, while complex, is more linear than previously thought. This linear decision process is illustrated in the Bohman Model.

Potential international students advance through all four steps at an uneven pace, even skipping a step in some cases. For example, international students already in the United States would have less need to address the first two steps of studying abroad and selection of the country of study. Uniquely inclusive, the Bohman Decision Model recognizes key questions to be answered and where students would likely obtain information or on whom they would rely for assistance. The model focuses on the factors international students often incorporate in their decision making leading to attending a community college. Recognizing how these students make this complex decision,

community colleges wanting to attract international students can more effectively target their marketing dollars and efforts.

Figure 6. The Bohman International Student Community College Decision Model



STEP 1- Preliminary Phase

Key Question: Should I study abroad?

Elements: Student's "global" identity and push-pull forces

Key Inputs: Family, peer group, and personal preferences

Secondary questions to answer:

Is studying abroad supported by my family and/or my culture?

Will I be challenged enough staying home or too much by studying abroad?

Where can I further my education and knowledge best?

What is best for my career goals?

This first step can start early in the process before the student reaches the equivalent of high school. As this study illustrates, nearly half of the participants in this study attended high school internationally. Some of the students' tendency to look abroad may be influenced by a culture which supports international study or the students' own personal drive to find their global identity.

Students at this step internalize how the experience of studying abroad would change them for the better. Students who have experience studying abroad prior to their college years may desire to return abroad because they are uninspired to stay at home. They see themselves as not bounded by a specific national identity, but something beyond being Japanese, Swedish, or Brazilian. This new global identity is only satiable through international experiences.

Forces outside of the students' internal desire for a global identity also contribute to this step in their decision making process. Students may be pushed out of

their country because of limited access to higher education. Their test scores or grades may prevent them from continuing with higher education in their home country, in essence, pushing them abroad. On the other hand, the prospect of better opportunities by studying abroad may serve to pull students internationally.

As students balance the positives and negatives impacts of their choice, friends and family play an influential role in this decision making process step. Parental approval can greatly sway the process particularly if the parents are contributing financially. In some cases, it is the parents who originally suggest the idea for studying abroad. Fellow classmates and relatives who share their stories of studying abroad contribute the creation of a culture which embraces the international experience.

In the Model's first step, community colleges are unlikely to have direct contact with potential international students at this point as the students have not yet determined if they will be international students or not. However, in a subtle way, the potential of attending a community college can enter the general discussion fostered by family, friends, or community college alumni who are from the prospective student's home country. It is important for community colleges to recognize and facilitate an active international alumni network, formal or informal, as a way to recruit potential international students during the first two steps of the decision making process.

STEP 2- Destination Phase

Key Question: Where should I go?

Elements: Initial information gathering, push-pull forces, and perceptions of countries

Key Inputs: Family, peer group, and personal preferences

Secondary questions to answer:

Is the country interesting to me?

Are my language skills sufficient?

What's the reputation of a degree or credential from this country?

What are my career prospects with a degree or credential from this country?

Will this country prepare me for a globalized workplace?

Do I have contacts in that country?

The key inputs for the second step are similar to the first step, but now the student is more actively investigating a destination country for studying. The personal or internal perceptions of the countries are instrumental at this step. Positive perceptions of a destination country are more likely to generate positive results (Chen and Zimitat, 2006; Cubillo, Sanchez, Cervino, and Olcese, 2005). Students evaluate whether the country is a place they would want to live. They weight push and pull factors of each destination through a number of factors.

One factor students consider is their proficiency with the language spoken in the country. Students may rule out countries in which they would struggle to communicate. The global proliferation of English makes places like the United States more desirable.

The United States has a number of other pulling forces which attract students. One pulling influence is the view of the U.S. as a global culture center, and consequently students may see the U.S. as a more interesting destination. The reputation of the U.S.'s higher education system translates into better career prospects in the view of the study's participants.

At this second step of the Model, students begin to more vigorously seek information about a destination country. Even cursory knowledge of someone currently residing in or has lived in the country can be helpful. An active local presence of community college district residents with international ties can serve as a conduit of information and support to develop links to potential international students. The strengths of these local contacts with connections to the students' home country are significant as the international students go further into the process. Another course of relevant first-hand information for international students can come from a cultivated and active international community college alumni network.

STEP 3 – Institutional Type Phase

Key Question: What type of school is best for me? (*Crucial step for community colleges*)

Elements: reliance in educational agency or other expert sources for information, less
reliance on preference

Key Inputs: Agents and governmental organizations or trusted contacts with first hand
experience

Secondary questions to answer:

How much will it cost?

How easy is it to be admitted?

Will it provide a path to my academic and/or career goals?

Are two-year career degrees an option?

What is the quality of education for that type of school?

The third step in the Model is the crucial decision step for both international students and community colleges. It is at this juncture in the decision making process where students often first learn about community colleges. The third step is the most dependent on external elements in making the decision. At this step, students have decided to study abroad and have selected a country in which to study. They are now engaged in the pragmatic business of selecting a particular college. It is at this point students begin to weigh factors such as college entry requirements and the overall cost.

In East Asia and Western Europe where a wide-spread study abroad industry exists, students turn to private educational agencies for information. In emerging source countries without many commercial agencies, governmental organizations may play a

more influential role. These expert sources, private and governmental educational agencies, not only supply this information for the students, but make recommendations as well. It is at this point in the process where students learn of their option to attend a community college. For cost effective international student outreach, community colleges need to cultivate a positive working relationship with private educational agencies and governmental organizations. Community colleges must demonstrate how they can facilitate the international students' academic and career plans.

STEP 4 – School Selection Phase

Key Question: Which school should I attend? (*Crucial step for community colleges*)

Elements: personal preferences and pull forces

Key Inputs: School brochures, school website, campus visit and word of mouth
recommendations

Secondary questions to answer:

Am I comfortable here?

Where is the community college located?

What is unique about this college?

Which majors are offered?

What type of services do they have for international students?

What universities can I transfer to from here?

How many international students does this community college have?

How responsive is the school to inquiries?

How many students speaking my native language are here?

In this fourth and final step of the Model, students make contact with their selected community colleges. Prior to making contact, students may review school materials such as a brochure or school website and if possible, visit the campus. Students at this step are looking for a “good fit”, an element which will rely more on their own personal preferences.

In this final step, unique characteristics of a community college act as a pulling force in the decision making process. Upon reaching this step, students have excluded other institutional types, including universities, but they may not have decided which

community college in an area to attend. Therefore, community colleges marketing to international students need to be cognizant of how and in what ways they compare to other community colleges in their immediate vicinity. As this study has shown, the two factors of price and location are key to the international student's decision to attend a community college. Any cost-saving service the college offers international students, no matter how small, can be significant. For example, not all community colleges offer airport pick-up for their international students upon arrival. Students have commented that these services confirm a school's commitment to their international students.

Broad Implication of the Bohman Model

The Bohman Model illustrates a complex process in which the international students make their decision to attend a U.S. community college. By utilizing the Bohman Model, community colleges can target their marketing efforts and dollars, formulate strategies to influence international students' decision making process and enhance the profile of U.S. community colleges globally.

At Step three, international students weigh the different types of higher education options available to them. Those students from abroad looking to complete a bachelor's degree may consider a four-year institution, while others seeking to enhance their global identity or a specific skill set may also consider U. S. for-profit technical institutions or language schools. It is at Step three in which U.S. community colleges, community college organizations, and the federal, state, and local governments can contribute greatly to the international students' decision making process. This is accomplished by providing information to increase awareness of the characteristics, roles and benefits of

U.S. community colleges which is lacking outside of the United States. Efforts to gain attention to community colleges internationally have been on the rise (AACC, 2008; Evelyn, 2005; IIE, 2008; Pekow, 2006). To be successful, these efforts need continual support from all levels of government and the community colleges themselves. This model can assist community colleges in attending and responding accordingly to factors which influence international students' decision to enroll.

Implications of Research Findings for Community Colleges

Community colleges provide educational opportunities essential for the global knowledge age. The inextricable forces of globalization cause individuals around the world to expand their expectations regarding the ways they can meet their personal educational and career goals. The United States with its global influence politically, culturally, and economically remains a sought after higher education destination for those students throughout the world who desire to study abroad. At this time, the vast majority of U.S. community colleges have not undertaken a strategic initiative to purposefully market to international students in direct response to the changing global dynamic. With further growth in students studying internationally and a need for community colleges to become more global in their thinking, this symbiotic relationship seeks to grow and flourish for the foreseeable future. However, the current global financial crisis has forced both students and community colleges alike to be increasingly judicious with their time, resources, and money. There is now a great need to understand the factors which contribute to international students making a decision to apply and attend a community

college. The findings of this study contribute to understanding these factors for mutual benefit to international students, community colleges, and the community they serve.

The implications of the research findings for community colleges wanting to recruit international students include the following:

1. All efforts revolving around international student recruitment as well as continued student interactions once they are attending the college need to be centralized.
2. Marketing needs to be focused on key steps in the international student decision making process.
3. The primary decision factors of location and cost must be incorporated into marketing messages.
4. Local sources valuable to recruiting international students must be identified.
5. Consideration of older, non-traditional international students seeking a career change or a new start should be recognized.

Centralizing Efforts

Community colleges committed to bringing international students to their campus need to centralize this multi-faceted endeavor. The complexity of recruiting international students and the subsequent mandatory reporting practices necessitates a designated person or persons. Community colleges can no longer afford to task international student enrollment to someone who already has other duties and responsibilities within the college and may not be knowledgeable about the intricacies of the federal and state rules and regulations. The participating institutions in this study had at least one full-time

employee dedicated to international student enrollment. At the rural community colleges, this one person orchestrated the marketing of the program, recruitment of students, and the vital job of supporting services for the students after they are enrolled. The suburban community college had departments with at least two full-time employees dedicated to these functions. An international student specialist is needed by the college to maintain federal requirements and engage the international students at the appropriate points in the decision making process and support them while they are at the institution.

Focusing Marketing

With fewer resources available at every community college, the recruitment of international students must be strategic and targeted. Successful outreach activities which can influence the decision of potential international students to attend a community college occurs during the third and fourth step of the Bohman Model. During these steps in the decision making process, students are first learning about community colleges and then selecting a community college to attend. Attempts to engage the international students prior to these two steps (Steps three and four) would most likely be ineffective since they are not at the decision making step where they need to know about community colleges and where one is geographically located. Partnering with entities which are central sources of information such as private or governmental educational agencies would be beneficial for community colleges in their international student recruitment efforts.

Incorporating Primary Decision Factors of Location and Cost

Community college international students share common factors which influenced their decision to attend a specific community college. These two predominate factors are cost and location. In particular, community college marketing materials must highlight the cost savings features of attending the college and its geographic location in relation to a large metropolitan area. Potential international students need to be made aware of community colleges' transfer function, open entry admissions, student support services and student-centered approach to learning. Even though these factors were not as predominant as cost and location, knowledge of them adds to their decision to attend a community college. Imparting information on community colleges' attributes is not the purview exclusively of community colleges. Continued and increased efforts by U.S. government organizations like EducationUSA and community college organizations like AACC and CCID are needed.

Identifying Local Sources of Recruitment

Community colleges need not look far from their districts as they strive to increase international student enrollments. As this study shows, residents living within community college suburban and rural districts have ties to potential international students. These community college district residents can and often are a primary source of information for international students. Even perfunctory knowledge of the community college from a friend or family member can cause international students to investigate this higher education option. Local recognition of community college international students and the college's internationalization efforts aids in elevating the global profile

of the community college to district residents. With international education beginning at earlier ages, international students may already exist in the district high schools. By partnering with the local residents and high schools, community colleges are invoking *glocalisation*, described in world culture theory as incorporating global and local elements.

Recognizing Non-Traditional Students

Community colleges provide an avenue for students to begin a career change or a second chance at their education at any point in their lifetime. Community colleges are investing more marketing efforts in attracting adult students, non-traditional students over 24 years of age, as well as the traditional 18-22 year old college student. These efforts could be extended overseas as well to the international student market. Access to higher education for older, non-traditional college age students is very limited or non-existent in some countries. Thus, U.S. community colleges can provide an educational option for this underserved international population seeking a career change or a new start. For other adult students, their motivation to study internationally is often driven by a need to enhance their global identity and bring this global understanding, *glocalisation*, back to their home country. Many of these students may already hold university degrees in their home countries. The position held by community colleges within the U.S. higher education system is of no significance to them. Instead, they are driven to community colleges because these institutions are able to deliver an affordable, comprehensive, education opportunity with the added attraction of being wrapped in the definitive American experience. The participants in this study are particularly motivated by value.

They recognize the increased financial obligations associated with their decision to attend U.S. higher education and find community colleges to be ideally suited to their fiscal constraints without sacrificing their academic goals.

It has been argued that community colleges provide a “cooling out” function, a soft denial to higher education expectations (Clark 1960). Yet, this does not seem to pertain to international students, who appear to be more on a path to “warming up,” earmarked for achievement. In turn, international students provide community colleges with a greater global profile during their time on campus, sharing knowledge of their native country and culture with other community college students. Interestingly, once the international students graduate or move on, they remain extremely valuable as community college alumni. As alumni, they can assist in attracting international students to the community college, provide international opportunities for community college students and faculty, and in general contribute their insights to the college. International students are valuable, yet uncultivated resources for all U.S. community colleges.

Recommendations for Future Research

The study’s multi-theoretical framework, world culture theory, push-pull theory, and cognitive decision making theory, granted the researcher a less restricted lens to view the factors which influenced the international students’ decision making process when choosing a U. S. community college. Further studies using these theories in relation to international students attending community colleges are recommended given that globalization will continue its significant role in everyone’s life and push- pull factors relative to decisions will only grow in number and strength.

Such future studies to consider might include the following:

- How do the long-term goals of the community college international student influence the decision making factors when selecting a community college?
- How and in what ways do different recruiting strategies change the decision making factors of international students contemplating attending U. S. community colleges?
- How and in what ways do changes in immigration procedures influence the decision making factors of international students considering U. S. community colleges?
- What is the predictability of international students' decision making process relative to selection of community colleges using the Bohman International Student Community College Decision Model.

Further research should not be limited to the international students themselves but should expand to the other players in this decision making process. The interconnections between the students, schools, private educational agencies, and governmental organizations need further research. Suggested future research topics might include:

- What factors or people drive community colleges to recruit international students?
- How are recruiting strategies determined for community colleges?
- How are recruiting strategies measured and assessed?
- What knowledge do private educational agencies possess on community colleges and how do they select community colleges for their student customers?

- How do community colleges develop relationships with private educational agencies and what do they look for in establishing a relationship?
- What criteria are used in evaluating the success of partnerships with private educational agencies?
- What knowledge do government agencies and organizations impart to potential students about community colleges and at what point does a discussion on community colleges start?
- How and in what ways do local community college students benefit from the cross-cultural opportunities with international students?

With more and more students seeking to globalize their post secondary education, a deeper understanding of how students decide to study abroad is needed. It is the hope of this researcher that further studies on community colleges and their involvement with international students will continue. The understanding which can be obtained from these scholarly efforts will foster intercultural dialogue between community colleges and the world beyond the college's district boundaries enriching all who participate.

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Appendix A
Letter Requesting Approval to Conduct Research with
International Students Attending a Community College

Dr. xxxx,

I am writing you in response to our phone conversation on (date) _____ in which I expressed my interest in conducting my research at (community college) _____ on international students' decision making process to attend a US community college. This research is part of my doctoral study in National-Louis University's Community College Leadership Program.

I have included a copy of my letter from Institutional Research Review Board of National-Louis University approving my research proposal along with all the supporting documentation for your review. If you have any questions pertaining to the research, you can contact me directly at 847-767-3723 / ebohman@comcast.net. My advisor and dissertation chair, Dr. Rebecca Lake, can be reached at 312-621-9650 ext. 3534 for any additional questions.

I am seeking permission from your office to allow me to conduct my research at (community college) _____ in the Spring of 2008. Upon receiving approval, I will contact the International Student Office and provide them with the supporting materials included with this letter.

Thank-you for your assistance,

Eric Bohman
Doctoral student, National-Louis University

Appendix B
Letter of Invitation for Participant



Dear International Student,

I am a student in a Community College Leadership Doctoral Program. I also teach at Harper College, a community college near Chicago. Because I work with international students at Harper College, I became interested in the process international students use when they choose to attend a community college.

I am inviting you to participate in a research study about how international students learn about community colleges and decide to attend a community college. I believe this topic is important to community colleges and international students themselves since the number of international students has been growing over the last five years.

I would be honored to have an opportunity to interview you for this study. I know that your time is valuable, so the interview will only take 30-60 minutes. You can be assured that your privacy will be respected and therefore your name and the name of your school will not be used in the study. I welcome any questions you might have about the study.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Eric Bohman
ESL Department
Harper College
1200 W. Algonquin Road
Palatine, IL 60067-7398

847-925-6750
ebohman@comcast.net

Appendix C

Informed Consent- Participant

Thank-you for agreeing to participate in this study which will take place from October 2007 through May 2009. This consent form outlines describes the purpose of the study and your involvement and rights as a participant.

I consent to participate in a research project conducted by Eric Bohman, a doctoral student at National-Louis University located in Chicago, Illinois.

I understand that this study is entitled: Coming to America: Factors for International Students' Decisions to Attend Community Colleges. The purpose of this study is to learn what factors influence international students to come to a community college in the United States.

I understand that my participation will consist of one audio-taped interview lasting 1 – 2 hours in length with a possible second, follow-up interview lasting 1 - 2 hours in length. I understand that I will receive a copy of my transcribed interview at which time I may clarify information.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time without prejudice until the completion of the study.

I understand that only the researcher, Eric Bohman, will have access to a secured file cabinet in which will be kept all transcripts, taped recordings, and field notes from the interview(s) in which I participated.

I understand that the results of this study may be published or otherwise reported to scientific bodies, but my identity will in no way be revealed.

I understand that there are no risks or benefits expected to me, no greater than that encountered in daily life. Further, the information that is shared will help community college better understand the needs of international students so students can be better served in the future.

I understand that in the event I have questions or require additional information I may contact the researcher: Eric Bohman, ESL Department, Harper College, 1200 W. Algonquin Road, Palatine, IL 60067-7398 (847) 925-6750, Email address: ebohman@comcast.net

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that you feel have not been addressed by me, you may contact my Primary Advisor and Dissertation Chair: Dr. Rebecca Sue Lake, National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, 60603, 312-261-3534; Email address: rebecca.lake@nl.edu or rslake1@comcast.net

Participant's Signature _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Signature _____ Date: _____

Appendix D
Demographic Questions

Please answer the following questions about your personal background.

Name _____

Date _____

Sex: ____Male ____Female

1. What is your home country?

2. What languages do speak?

3. Had you been to the U.S.A before you started studying here?

If yes, when and how long?

4. Have you ever studied internationally before?

If yes, when and where?

5. Have any of your family members studied internationally?

If yes, who and where?

6. Do you have family members or friends living near the school?

If yes, did the family members or friends live near the school before you came to study?

7. Did you study at a college or university in your home country before coming to the USA?

If yes, for how long? If yes, what did you study?

Appendix E Interview Questions

Name _____

Date _____ School _____

Please answer the following questions about how you became an international student at your school.

1. When did you first start planning to study internationally?
2. Why did you decide on coming to the U.S.A to study?
 - a. Did you consider schools in your home country?

If no, why not? If yes, why did you decide study internationally?
 - b. Did you consider other countries to study internationally?

If yes, what countries and why did you consider those countries?
3. How did you first learn about American community colleges?
4. When you first learned about American community colleges, what did you like about them?
 - a. Did you consider other types of schools like 4-year public universities or 4-year private colleges?

If yes, what types of schools and why did you consider these schools?
5. How did you first learn about your school?
6. When you first learned about your school, what did you like about it?
7. Why did you select this school?
 - a. Did you consider other American community colleges?

If yes, what schools and why did you consider these schools?
8. How would you describe a community college to someone who does not know what a community college is?

Thank-you for participation in this study, Eric Bohman

Appendix F
Confidentiality Agreement

Data Transcriptionist

This confidentiality form articulates the agreement made between Eric Bohman, the researcher, and {*Name of the individual and company of a professional transcriber*}

I understand and acknowledge that by transcribing the audiotapes provided to me by Eric Bohman, that I will be exposed to confidential information about the research study and the research participants. In providing transcription services, at no time will I reveal or discuss any of the information of which I have been exposed.

In addition, at no time will I maintain copies of the digital or paper documents generated. Further, upon completing each transcription, I agree to provide the digital and paper documents to the researcher.

Eric Bohman
ESL Department
Harper College
1200 W. Algonquin Road
Palatine, IL 60067-7398
847-925-6750
ebohman@comcast.net

I understand that a breach of this agreement as described above could result in personal and professional harm to the research participants for which I will be held legally responsible.

Transcriptionist's Signature _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Signature _____ Date: _____

Appendix G
E-mail Confirming Transcript Accuracy

Thank-you for your participation in my research study. As we discussed, I am sending you the transcript of our interview on (date) _____. Please review the transcript to see if the information is accurate. Contact me by email or phone if any changes to the transcript are needed.

Appendix H

Informed Consent- Focus Group

I consent to participate in a research project conducted by Eric Bohman, doctoral candidate in National-Louis University's Community College Leadership Program.

I understand that this study is called: Coming to America: Factors for International Students' Decisions to Attend Community Colleges. The purpose of this study is to learn what factors influence international students to come to a community college in the United States.

I understand that I will be participating in a focus group session last 1-2 hours which can be audio-taped. I understand that my participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time.

I understand that there are no risks or benefits expected to me, no greater than that encountered in daily life. I understand the exchange of information and perspectives that could occur in my participation could have a positive benefit to my own work with international students and the institution I serve.

I understand that confidentiality of the study participants will be maintained with no names being used in the report. I understand that the researcher will keep all data including field notes, tapes, transcriptions, and documents in a secured locked cabinet.

I understand that I can contact the researcher if I have any questions or need more information.

Researcher Contact Information: Eric Bohman
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I understand that I can contact the researcher's advisor for this study if I have any additional questions or concerns.

Researcher's Dissertation Chair and Advisor: Dr. Rebecca S. Lake
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Participant's Signature _____ Date: _____
 Researcher's Signature _____ Date: _____

Appendix I
Focus Group - Interview Questions

Name _____

Date _____ Current Position _____

The purpose of this study is to identify what factors lead international students to attend community colleges. The participants in this study will be degree seeking international students (F-1) completing their second or third semester at their community college.

Please review the following questions proposed for the international student interview.

1. When did you first start planning to study internationally?
2. Why did you decide on coming to the U.S.A to study?
 - a. Did you consider schools in your home country?
If no, why not? If yes, why did you decide study internationally?
 - b. Did you consider other countries to study internationally?
If yes, what countries and why did you consider those countries?
3. How did you first learn about American community colleges?
4. When you first learned about American community colleges, what did you like about them?
 - a. Did you consider other types of schools like 4-year public universities or 4-year private colleges?
If yes, what types of schools and why did you consider these schools?

5. How did you first learn about your school?
6. When you first learned about your school, what did you like about it?
7. Why did you select this school?
 - a. Did you consider other American community colleges?
If yes, what schools and why did you consider these schools?

8. How would you describe a community college to someone who does not know
what a community college is?

After reviewing the proposed interview questions for the study participants, do you feel additional clarification is needed for any questions and do you believe the questions will garner the information require for the purposes of the study?

Thank-you for your participation.